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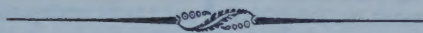
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Foreword



As the page proofs of this number are being passed for press, the news comes through that the Conservatives have won the General Election of 1955, and with a solid majority.

Each of us, according to his political colour, will have his private rejoicings or lamentations to utter about this event. But to those of us who are, professionally, writers, as writers does it matter?

In some quarters, during the General Election of 1945, high hopes were entertained, perhaps rather eccentrically, that the return of a Labour Government would mean respect for things of the mind expressed at last in concrete fashion by those whom we elect to rule us. How this delusion—for delusion it soon proved to be—arose has never been satisfactorily explained, except as a hangover from the thirties, when most writers and artists were hostile to the Conservative, or so-called National Government of the day because of its foreign policy. Came the dawn, and those who were associated with *Horizon*, *Life and Letters*, *New Writing* or *Scrutiny*, quickly realized that it takes more than an alteration of Government to make the lion change its spots; that poets, novelists and critics in Britain were not immediately going to assume the importance of Academicians in France because Mr Attlee had been substituted for Mr Churchill. Income tax continued to crush them unfairly, and philistine indifference barely to tolerate their occasional odd desire to express antinomian views and to refuse to accept the new Welfare State as the pattern of all earthly perfection.

Since then, they have, it seems, grown to accept their disillusionment, and to assume that when Governments change in this country, as far as they are concerned it is merely a change of King Log for King Stork. Under Tory and Labour, the flag of a minority culture has continued to be staunchly flown for them by the Third Programme, whose High Priests have (occasionally) allowed them to assist in the celebration of the mysteries; the Arts Council has been directed intelligently and sufficiently independently to cause grievances and indignation from time to time; and a freakishly indulgent

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MACMILLAN

FOREWORD

Treasury has, through all the ups and downs of the basic travel allowance, continued to agree that a certain additional amount of foreign currency is necessary to keep the springs of inspiration flowing. This, they decided, was as far as the revolution was going to go for them; no use to revive any of the hopes they had in earlier days, when the outlines of our post-war society had still not set.

But is the assumption that they can expect no more correct? Is the difference between the parties really non-existent for them? If creative artists demanded the acceptance of a minimum charter before they gave their vote, what would it contain?

They would, I believe, first of all expect that the weighting of income-tax against them should be remedied. A start was indeed made by Mr Butler during the life of the last Government; but it still remains a fact, though not so glaring a fact as previously, that while an author may take half a lifetime to reach the point (if he ever reaches it) when he can earn the fruits of his apprenticeship and so achieve the freedom and leisure for his mature work, he is still taxed as if those fruits were the normal income of a brief span of years. That would be an essential beginning. They might then suggest that as the British Council is the chief recipient of funds allocated for the purpose of maintaining our intellectual prestige among the nations, it should be run by and for writers, savants and artists, and no longer be considered the last nest that the civil servant of a contracting empire can feather. But above all they would ask, not to be directed, or even supported by the State, but to be *left alone*: to live their own unconventional lives, in which leisure, or irregularity of productive work plays such a necessary part, to exchange ideas as freely as possible with their contemporaries and peers in all other countries (America included), to stumble on their own truths in their own time, and not to be hounded by antiquated laws when in the serious pursuit of their art they offend Mrs Grundy.

Most of these demands, modest though they are, would involve a conscious effort of abnegation on the part of a modern State; if our new Government, with its declared belief in setting the people free, can make that effort, then it is the Government for us.

Owing to a last-minute re-arrangement of make-up, due to causes beyond our control, we have been obliged to postpone our correspondence to the next number. In the same (August) number, we shall print a critical symposium on the works of Aldous Huxley, a selection of which have recently been published by Penguin Books, with Evelyn Waugh, Peter Quennell, Angus Wilson, Francis Wyndham and John Wain contributing.

JOHN LEHMANN

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THOM GUNN

Two Poems

THE PARAPLEGIC LYING ON HIS BACK

Slowly turning out of his way
To conciliate an angry friend;
Or idling dutifully where
The Galleries of Art extend;

Or standing at parties hour by hour;
Or hurrying to catch a train
To meet a bullying father-in-law
And talk about alimony again:

All the discipline of trivia
Put on the legs by a decent mind,
Like tracks made level by the snow
In this white world is left behind.

He scowls at the nurse, at visitors,
Jerks the fresh flowers to the floor,
And his manhood is mocked by the pretty cousins
Bringing their pity through the door.

In pain, in impotence, his mind
Sets the finished emblems apart,
And abandons, as clutter of the past,
The fraudulent workings of the heart.

Slip-shod ambitions put away
That kept the feet from going bare,
He fashions for his new-found will,
Carefully, clothes that will not wear.

THOM GUNN

And passion he has not known before
Swells in a life of day to day:
He trains the muscles that remain,
Reclaims himself from heavy clay.

If he could get the powers back
That formerly churned below his waist,
He would not use them differently
From having a stronger arm and chest.

But standing at parties, catching trains,
Conciliating the angry friend,
He would be conscious as he is now
That action only is action's end.

For a mind is paralysed to stone
Without a ready consciousness
That value does not drop like manna
But is wrenched from what is valueless.

Outsider, you whose useless legs
Have led you from not farther in
The deepened habit, your power lies
In less than there has ever been.

A DISTRICT IN ROME

Washing joins elementary school to church,
Where on a mediaeval tower, brick trunk
In white leaf, pigeons trample softly, lurch
Across the swollen tiles and, cooing drunk,
Compete with sawmill in the street beneath.

All that is old is used, unlike the scraps,
Damned though unjustly to a permanent death,
That twitter in museums how the gaps
They left are long since filled. Ghosts, flap your hands,
Old things are used by pigeons and by men,
Content yourselves with mediums from new lands
— You have no chance of being used again,
Casually touched by one who understands
The why of you at once, though not the when.

JOHN PETER

The Fun of the Fair

Ricky squatted on his haunches, balancing a stone in each hand, watching the dully gleaming blade of the spade bite into the chocolate earth and the rough sour sea-grass, his eyes screwed up against the wind and the dazzle of the sun. John Makanya dug on steadily, his clean white shirt bellying from his shoulders as he stooped. They were both silent. Into the silence the wind blew a swirl of raucous music from the fair over the hill. Glancing up into the black face Ricky found it so impassive that he wondered whether his questions had angered the Zulu. He rose and picked up an empty jam jar lying in the grass, balancing it on one of the fenceposts.

'Look here, John. I'll show you how straight I can throw. Bet you I knock that off in five shots.'

The spade paused. 'You better throw at something else, Baas Reecky. You won't want fragments of glass lying in the grass. Look' — Makanya shook the soil from a rusty can he had turned up — 'try thees.' He set it on the fencepost.

Ricky retired to the other end of the grassy yard and began throwing. He did it extraordinarily well and the third stone took the can from the post with a smack and a clatter.

'Heke!' said Makanya politely. It was plain he wasn't interested. Ricky squatted down once more at the edge of the dug patch and resumed the conversation.

'But if you had a scholarship why didn't you go back to college? Can't you still go?'

'Yes. Of course I can go.' Makanya sounded detached. 'I do not want to go.'

'But that's silly. Surely it doesn't make all that difference just because you're black?'

'Law ees not the occupation for a Kaffir.'

'I don't see why not. Kaffirs will do everything one day, when

they've got sense like you.'

'Eet ees a very far-off day.' Makanya stared out to sea for a minute. Then he raised his hand and pointed. 'You see the horizon, Baas Reecky. Eet ees blue above and blue underneath, but we see eet as a line, do we not? Who weell take thet line away?'

Ricky scowled at the water. Most of the dazzle had been blown off it by the wind and along the shore the surf was lashing up puffs of spray.

'Ricky! Ricky where are you?' His sister Ellen, a tall girl, pretty, with a tanned skin and fair hair that sea-bathing had coarsened, came round the corner of the house and frowned when she caught sight of him.

'Really Ricky, you're the limit. It's four o'clock. What about mother's present?' Then she said sternly to Makanya, 'John, you're not to keep him hanging about. He's got to buy a present for the missus. It's her birthday tomorrow.' She turned to her brother. 'Where's the money I gave you? I suppose you've lost it already.'

'No, of course I haven't.' Ricky produced a half-crown from the pocket of his khaki shorts and showed it to her. 'Anyway it's not much. You can't get much for half-a-crown.'

'You can get a good deal more for half-a-crown than you can get for nothing,' said his sister tartly. 'Next year you might try saving your own money for a change. Come on now, hurry up.'

She watched him irritably as he walked slowly off down the path and out at the gate.

'For heaven's sake try to get something reasonable,' she called after him. 'And you're not to go to the fairground. I know you.' She shook her head and glanced at John Makanya, who had turned his back and was digging again. Then she went indoors, slamming the door behind her.

Ricky had paid no attention. He walked on, kicking at the tussocks of the grass, whistling. The path was sandy, with shells in it, and as he walked he picked up pieces of shell and threw them at the posts of the wire fences. But they were too light and the wind caught them and blew them aside in a curve. As he went up the slope from the house the snatches of martial music grew more and more distinct. Soon he breasted the rise and the din of the fair swelled up and rioted in his ears. For a time he stood looking down on the brilliant tents and pavilions, the whirling red-and-blue roundabout and the flying swings. Then he broke into a run and went pelting down the grassy incline towards them.

It was sixpence to enter the ground. He slipped his two shillings into his pocket. He knew what he had to do, but how exactly was it

to be done? You had to be cool, you couldn't let yourself get caught up. He put his hands in his pockets, sauntering, suppressing the excitement that came surging up almost at once. Overhead the swings spun wildly, their occupants shrieking. Everywhere he looked there were barkers yelling, pleading, cajoling. There was the Whip, red as a fire engine, hurtling heavy cars round its thundering oval platform. The roundabout spun giddily, blurring to puce, pouring its brazen music into the hubbub. Maddened by the uproar around them two dogs rushed blindly past him, barking, barking without pause.

Suddenly he stopped. There across the grass from him, in a long black tray, glittering sharply in the sunlight, a mess of diamonds was spread. He moved closer, dodging between the bystanders, the sparkles in the tray dancing with every movement of his head. Lined up on the dusty black velvet, rank after shining rank of them, he saw dozens of tiny fragile unbelievable figures. Pigs, birds, elephants, horses, antelopes, clowns—the whole of creation seemed to be there, and all of it fashioned from the most delicate, the frailest and finest glass he had ever seen. His breath caught as he leaned over the display. His first impression had been of white brilliance but now he saw that most of the models were tinted: honey-coloured horses, pale green elephants, pink pigs.

He became aware of a droning toneless voice from the other side of the tray and, looking up, saw in the hot green shadow of the canvas a fat man with a bald head sitting hunched over an open lamp. The flame of the lamp was taut, hissing pale under pressure, and it yielded only slightly to the gusts of the wind. The bald man held what looked like a rod of red glass in the flame, twisting it, and then, interrupting his monologue to apply his mouth to it for a moment, blew a sudden pink bubble of glass. Holding the bubble against the flame with a small pair of tongs, and pausing occasionally to blow gently into the tube, he manipulated it quickly and adroitly, his commentary proceeding almost unchecked. Against the hissing of the flame and the windy noises of the fair his mumbled words were mostly inaudible, but for Ricky it was enough to be able to watch the dexterity of his fingers. A final twist, a final snip with the tongs. Then a pale girl came forward and, taking the model from the glass-blower's hand, added yet another pink pig to the collection on the tray. The fat man picked up a cup of tea and sat sipping from it.

Ricky was astonished that he could be so indifferent to the treasure his hands had fashioned and his eyes returned wonderingly to the bright fragilities on the velvet in front of him. There was the latest pig, vivid in the sunlight, with only a minute kink in its tail to differentiate it from the others. Was it possible the fat man could have

made all these? His eyes moved fascinatedly over the models and at once, for the first time, with a pang like cold water in his belly, he saw his mother's present.

There were three of them, slightly bigger than the other models and a little to one side of them. Windmills. All of clear white glass, their vanes a filigree of fine glass threads like cobwebs. Each had a tower of solid glass struts, with narrow braces crisscrossing between them, and each tower was topped off with a small glass ball. Taking the sunlight they flared with the white fire of ice. Ricky stood staring.

'And for you, sir?'

It was a few seconds before he realized that it was to him that the pale girl was speaking. She leaned over the tray, her smile at once insinuating and bleak.

'How much is a windmill?'

'Oh yes. A windmill. Those *are* rather special, aren't they? Look,' she said, spinning the vanes with her finger, 'the sails go round too. Eight shillings and sixpence. Would you like one? Shall I wrap it?'

'No thanks. I won't take it yet.'

The girl, indifferent, drifted away.

Ricky felt that the two shillings in his pocket had suddenly become lighter and less substantial, but at the same time he wasn't very surprised. You couldn't expect to buy anything like one of those windmills cheap. People who had been watching the glass-blowing were moving away, the pale girl had withdrawn into the shadow of the booth, and the fat man seemed incapable of further exertion.

Hands in pockets, pursing his mouth, Ricky turned away. At least he now had something specific, a price and a purchase, to aim at. He strolled more confidently between the sideshows, forgetful of the racket and colour around him, intent on finding a breeding ground for the two coins in his pocket.

This sort of thing, tossing small rings at awkwardly shaped prizes, was useless. Even if you won you could hardly persuade the pale girl to do a swap. The coconut-shies, where he might have had some success, were no better. If he won at all it would have to be money. For a while he hung about a stall where people were rolling pennies on a chequer-board and winning or losing according to whether their coins dropped in a square or across the lines. But he soon saw that most of them were losing, and even when they won it was only a few pennies at a time.

He moved on down the green alley between the booths. The din in his ears had trumpeted and squealed itself into monotony and he

went on listlessly, his face set in a stiff smile. Two young girls, arm in arm, giggling huskily, their glances darting on all sides, walked slowly by. The visitors to the resort, driven from the beach by the wind, thronged about him, jostling him as he walked, laughing, disputing, teasing, lining up to have their fortunes told, to see the hermaphrodite, to buy ice cream and pink lemonade. A tall lugubrious man with a sagging paunch like a kangaroo, strolling by, hawked thickly in his throat, spat into the grass, and carefully set his foot on the spit. Three boys older than himself, elegantly dressed in dark blazers and grey flannels, were standing beside a skittle alley. They stared at his khaki shorts and dirty sandshoes. The tallest made some remark and they all laughed noisily, staring at him, challenging him to show signs of resentment. He saw they were waiting for an excuse to accost him and pick a quarrel, and he hurried on. He was careful not to look round but his back felt exposed and cold. There was a knot of men in front of him, standing before an open booth, and he slipped in among them, threading his way to the counter. He was relieved to sense their bodies closing up behind him, hemming him in.

'Well, who's next?' the man behind the counter was saying. He looked down at Ricky and grinned across at the men above the boy's head. Then he stooped confidentially. 'You want to try your luck, young shaver?'

'No,' Ricky said promptly. He had no intention of being drawn into a contest before he had sized it up, and he was faintly repelled by the condescension in the man's voice and his unfamiliar accent. Then he noticed a board, bright orange, at the back of the booth, painted in large blue letters.

FIVE SHIES A SHILLING!

WIN FIVE SHILLINGS!

FIVE TO ONE!

'What do I shy at?'

The heavily built man in charge stepped elaborately aside. He was evidently something of a wag, in his own eyes at least.

'Observe,' he said, his hand flourishingly largely. 'Yonder we have *Bi-seek-le*. *Bi-seek-le* notice. *Bicycle* may be good enough for you and me, but not him. He is mounted, as you see, on a wooden seat. And the seat, in turn, is mounted on a wooden bar or beam. And at the other end of the beam we have the target, the mark. For a modest outlay I provide you with ammunition for the aforesaid target—to wit, cricket balls. Five of them. You throw. You throw accurately. You hit the bull. What happens? A catch springs, the bar tilts, and *Bi-seek-le* is deposited, to the satisfaction of all present, into the tub of sea-water which, as you see, awaits him below.' He paused, sniff-

ing, acknowledging the rather contemptuous chuckles of the men standing round. 'More than that. Not only do you provide us all with some sport, and Bi-*seek-le* with a ducking, you also provide yourself with the sum—not princely perhaps, but not to be sneezed at—of five bob.'

The heavy florid face inclined towards Ricky again. 'Well,' he said sharply, 'what d'you think?'

The boy realized that the barker was simply using him, talking into him as he might have talked into a microphone. Even a grown man would have found it difficult to hit so small a target, and the booth was long and narrow, so that you had to throw hard. The piccanin Bicycle, dressed only in a garment like a nightshirt, looked small and forlorn on his perch. He was dripping wet and the wind, catching him in the shadow of the canvas roof, kept him constantly shivering. Every now and then he fell into a bout of coughing, his little body doubling up painfully. At the other end of the pivoted bar was the target, a deceptively large disc of wood with a small black bull.

Ricky took his eyes off the piccanin and put one of his shillings on the counter. 'I'll have a shot.'

'Splendid! Splendid!' The barker's voice was unctuously patronizing. Obviously he hadn't expected the boy to accept his challenge. 'Five balls for the younger generation,' he added, fishing them up from under the counter. 'Everything ready for the plunge.'

Ricky picked up a cricket ball. It felt comfortable in his hand, but heavy to throw so far. The men standing round moved back, giving him room to swing his arm.

'Hey, look at this, man! He's just about as small as that little black devil up there.'

Ricky swung back, gathered himself, and tried to throw the ball high and slow. But he didn't put enough force behind it and it fell short, rapping the lower edge of the wooden disc. At least it was straight. There was a murmur of encouragement.

'*Mooi skoot!*'

'Nice work, kid. Try it a bit harder.'

Another ball, feeling heavier than the first. He threw it hard enough this time but it swung over to the left and almost missed the target altogether.

'Hey! Come on! You can do better'n that.'

The muscles in his shoulder began to ache and he knew he could not afford to throw too often. He picked up the third ball and balanced it in his hand, measuring the distance to the target with his eye. Then with an easy fluent swing he sent it flying up the length of

the booth.

There was a sharp clear *clack* from the wood, the beam thudded across and the little Zulu pitched into the water on his face. Ricky could hear the exclamations of the men behind him, felt one of them slapping him warmly on the back, but he stood quite still, watching the tub of water. He was relieved to see the small sodden figure climb out. Bicycle crawled up on to his perch and the barker swung the beam back until it was level again. For a minute the small black face was directed at the group in front of the booth. Then it was hidden as another bout of coughing caught him.

The barker came back to the counter, his heavy red face scornfully smiling. He put two halfcrowns and Ricky's original shilling on the wooden counter. The two balls that the boy had not used he quickly removed.

'So my friends. It seems we have a prodigy in our midst. *Five* balls are two too many for him.' He stooped forward as he had done before, bringing his face uncomfortably close. 'Have another go? You're not finished, you know. The soul of liberality, that's me. Everyone can have another turn. Besides, this is rather special, isn't it? Youth versus youth, you might say. Well, what d'you say?'

Not quite realizing what he was doing, remembering only that it was imperative to win again, Ricky picked up the halfcrowns, leaving his shilling on the counter. There were mutters of approval behind him.

'All right,' he said softly.

Five more balls on the counter. The barker stepped aside, giving them a sight of the little Zulu again. He had stopped coughing and sat quietly, the wind whipping the wet nightshirt against his dangling legs. As they watched he fell into a fit of shivering, his shoulders jerking in convulsive spasms.

'Man, look at that little bastard shiver! There's one chap who hopes you miss!'

The barker smiled his sour smile. 'Don't you worry about *Bi-seek-le*. He's used to it. How about me? I stand to lose five bob, don't I?'

Ricky picked up the first ball and sent it flying. It was fairly close, no more.

'*Ampertjies, jong.*'

'Hard luck! Never mind, you've got four more.'

He had no confidence in the next throw and it went wide, striking the canvas at the back of the booth, hopelessly low.

'Getting a bit tired eh?' The barker made no attempt to keep the note of satisfaction out of his voice. 'Well, well. Can't have every-

thing, you know.'

Ricky's shoulder was painful and he felt shaky from the effort to throw beyond his strength. He drew back again, the third ball in his hand, and swung his arm. But one of the men behind had moved forward and his arm brushed against him as he threw, disturbing his balance. The ball pitched straight at the Zulu on the perch and it was only by leaping quickly off his seat that he avoided it. This time he fell upright into the water, with a smaller splash.

'Hey! That's not the way!'

'It's not the kid's fault. It's you. Yes, you. You knocked his arm.'

'Come on, stand back, *jong!* Give him room.'

Bicycle was back on his perch in a few seconds, climbing on to it from the edge of the tub. His dark face was quite expressionless.

'Well,' said the barker. 'I wouldn't call that exactly orthodox, but you're not the first to try it. As you see, *Bi-seek-le* is quite ready for our more homicidal customers. Unless you're only concerned to give him a few extra wettings—which I'm prepared to doubt, seeing how hard you throw—you'll have to do a good deal better than that.' He stood aside, scratching his stomach with his grimy hands, winking and grinning over Ricky's head.

Ricky hated him, hated his ponderous sentences and his overripe voice. Suddenly he hated the lot of them. He snatched up a cricket ball and, venting his feelings in the action, flung it hard and high and straight, hardly feeling the sharp twinge in his shoulder.

Clack!

There was a cheer as the Zulu plunged off his perch again, smacking flat on the water. The men were clapping Ricky on the back. He stood miserably, watching for the dripping figure to emerge from the tub. The barker bustled up, pushing the silver coins across the counter to him.

'No more. That's the rule, gents, isn't it? Disqualified after two wins. Move along now. Give someone else a turn. Come on, boy. Pick up your cash. D'you want me to keep it? How much more d'you want?' He smiled lopsidedly at the bystanders. 'Thirty pieces, that's what he wants. Thinks he's Judas. Come on, get out of the way.'

Mechanically Ricky put the coins into his pocket, turning and ducking away between the grinning onlookers. He felt shaky and faint and a heavy spittle of disgust had collected so thickly in his throat that he had to pause behind a canvas booth to get rid of it. He stood there for a while, deaf to the sounds of the fairground and grateful for the freshness of the seawind blowing in his face.

The sun had set and the late summer sky was fading to pearl, with

here and there a smudge of sorrel cloud, as John Makanya came down the sandy path. His feet kept falling into step with the march-tune that blew across from the fair. Then he would break the rhythm, walking faster. There was something derisive in the jaunty blare of the music and it irritated him to submit to it.

A small figure in khaki appeared on the slope below him and he struck off across the dimming grass to meet it. Apart from the two of them the long sweep of pasture down to the rocky coast was deserted: anyone not at supper was probably at the fair.

Ricky was walking slowly, with his head down. He looked up as the Zulu approached. 'Hallo John. Are you off?'

'Baas Reecky, you better hurry. Meess Ellen she's been looking for you. Eet's past seven o'clock.'

The boy paid no attention. 'Look here,' he said. 'I bought a present.' He handed Makanya the book he had been carrying. It was obviously secondhand, stained and battered. The Zulu looked at the spine: *The Law of the Constitution*. Ricky looked tired. What had he been up to?

'Ees thees for your mother?'

'Of course not. It's for you. Is it a good book?'

'Very good, yes.' No point in telling the boy he already had a copy, packed away with his other books at home. 'But what about your mother? Deed you get something for her?'

'I got the book at the newsagent's. He's got a whole lot of old books at the back of his shop. One and six. That's cheap isn't it? I've got two shillings to give back to Ellen too.'

'What about the present for your mother, Baas Reecky? Deed you get one?'

Ricky unbuttoned his shirt and showed a glimpse of a cardboard box. 'It's a glass windmill. I don't want it to get broken.'

He sounded so indifferent the Zulu was about to question him further, but he restrained himself. It was none of his business.

'Don't you like the book?'

'Yes, indeed. I'm jaast concerned. . . .'

'Look here John, you've got to go back to college. You *must*. I want you to go back. Say you will, John.'

Makanya had almost forgotten his own affairs. Now the oppressive weight of consciousness descended again. Looking down into the boy's eyes, the impetuosity and bafflement in them, he felt suddenly heavy with despair, like a patient reminded of his disease. All the misery and frustration trembled in him again, ready to come flooding back. He repressed them, forcing them down.

'I cannot say so now, Baas Reecky.'

He hardly realized that he had spoken, looking at the boy. He saw that Ricky's expression was strained and intense. Surely he hadn't spent the whole afternoon brooding over their conversation?

'I weell theenk about it again,' he said, trying to sound as if he meant it. In one sense it was perfectly true.

'You must, John! You must!' The fierce young voice demanded reassurance. Dropping his eyes Makanya saw a shell in the grass beside his shoe. He put his foot on it, grinding it into the earth. The earnestness in the boy's voice touched him more closely than he wanted to admit. What reassurance could he give? He tried to smile, forcing the rising brusqueness out of his voice.

'You better hurry. Meess Ellen weell want to see what you bought.'

'Are you really going to think about it?'

'Yes, Baas Reecky. I promise I weell.'

Giving the boy no time to reply he turned away. Their figures moved apart on the wan green of the pasture, Makanya going slowly down towards the shore, without looking back. He breathed deeply, inhaling the fresh, moist air. A group of Zulus who had spent the afternoon hanging over the fence of the fairground, fascinated by the diversions they were not permitted to enjoy, were strolling homeward along the empty beach. As they walked they chanted softly, but the booming of the surf drowned the words of their song. He paused, watching them pass on the darkened sand. Behind them the thin exhausted waves came running in, shining like steel in the dusk.

The air was turning chilly now but in his abstraction he did not notice it. He came to a sunken sandy path that led down to the beach and made his way along it, moving down between the gentle slopes of the grass-entangled dunes. Out on the beach the sand was soft and still warm from the sun. He plodded through it, making for the water, and when it grew firm and wet underfoot he turned aside, skirting the yellowish line of drying foam that marked the reach of the waves. Here the walking was easier, and as he went on he opened the book and glanced at the pages, trying to read. There were marginal annotations in pencil and at the sight of them a wave of nostalgia swept up in him.

Feeling desperate, shocked at the violence of the reaction, he snapped the book shut again. Something in him was famished, silently shrieking. He had had no notion that it could be so implacable. Involuntarily he quickened his pace.

The noise of the fair was far off and now he walked with only the thunderous drumming of the surf in his ears, and the soft cold swish-

THE FUN OF THE FAIR

ing of the spent waves. He went on across the beach until he came to the rocks that blocked it off from the next bay. Skirting the dull rock-pools and hesitating from rock to rock he made his way along the broken surface of the promontory until he came to the point where it fell away abruptly below him, into the sea. Here, grateful for the loneliness of the situation, he sat down on the damp stone. To right and left of him the Natal coast looped away, bay after bay of it, into the dusk. Below him the heavy black swell of the sea rose and fell, rose and fell, palely foaming where it met the angles of the rocks. It was like sitting on the end of a pier, a pier that had been smashed flat by the sea so that now nothing but a straggling jumble of huge stones remained.

He sat for a long time there, without moving, dimly aware of the darkness drawing in around him. The book that the boy had given him lay on the rock beside him. The sky grew darker and as the light died away the horizon disappeared. Blowing in off the sea the wind turned colder. High on the rock, exposed to the spray that blew across, damping his shirt, Makanya began to shiver. He sat looking down, sightlessly, not noticing the shuddering of his shoulders.

Below, as if waiting for some force to fling him from his perch, the Indian Ocean heaved and subsided, the white foam tossing on the unfathomable blackness of the water.



Robert Hunt: The Isle of Dogs from Greenwich

GEORGE BARKER

A Domestic Poem



MONOLOGUE OF THE WIFE

O Love in your empty bed
Here is my harrowing.
I watch that hero stride
His sword erect and pride
As red as my own blood,
Rise up at this bedside
To haunt my solitude.

O sad the fallow places,
Where is their harrowing?
They lie so lonely now
To see the rutting plough
Driving its bridegroomed horn
Over remoter landscapes
And joy on other faces.
The smile is on their lips
To see that share so worn,
That pride in an eclipse
Its furrowing duty done.
His sceptre is abused
By arrogance of womb
His diadem is used
To ornament the crime,
While I lie empty here
Like a cold sea at dawn
Awaiting a rise of hero
His fiery striker drawn
To aggrandize my farrow
And glorify what's born.

MONOLOGUE OF THE HUSBAND

How can I ever escape
So pinioned to that thigh?
I fly my horoscope
In the star of that eye,
And bound in the decrees
Babe, sacrament and rope
Of those bridal knees?
The yoked beast must quest
Far from his loved cave
And the devoted breast,
For ridden passion craves
New victims and votives.
The beast devouring flesh
Is jaded of its own —
The two that are made one,
And can only refresh
His sick and obscene machine
In those gross beds of flesh
Wherein no spirit lies
To bind the heroic beast
Down with analogies.
But the dovetailing fury
Of those two with one back,
Rages in that void orgy
From which all human glory
Of spirit or of heart
Has been thrust out. Thrust out —
O garden of a memory! —
And so the vindictive Adam
Debars from his carnal love
That tyrannic paraclete
Who from a paradise drove
Us into sexual freedom.
Thus the vindictive Adam
Avenes a lost Eden
In the unholy embrace
Of all strumpeting women.
He disgraces his disgrace.
O who could ever bear
To know again in his arms

GEORGE BARKER

The victress of that pair
He now sees only in dreams
Of innocence foregone?
Thus this intemperate beast
Roams furiously alone
From loveless breast to breast
From cave or lair or hole—
His rod can never rest
Seeking to rack the soul—
So these sad monsters range
Over the rocks and bones
Of sexual satisfaction
To degrade the Angel
And desecrate God's vision
With a stick and two stones.
I hide my one-horned head,
That skull-capped mastodon
In the hot death of the bed
Where neither good nor bad
But a beast's toil is done.
And hissing in her spirals
The dappled temptress flenses
My skeleton of its morals
And red ram of the senses.
So in the rummaged pit
I kill the man in and out
Splayed on that proud fork.
No love, no love, no love,
O let no brightness in—
But the sheet-lightning shove
Where we end, and begin.

L. P. HARTLEY

Per Far l'Amore

That August in Venice, an August between the wars, the mosquitoes were particularly poisonous and voracious. Even the Venetians, who are usually immune, being inoculated against these pests, sometimes appeared with reddened wrists and swollen faces. Nor did the insects abide by their own rules; they did not wait for twilight to begin their feasts; they bit by day as well as by night. Hotel proprietors and their staffs, even while covertly scratching themselves, would not admit that there was anything abnormal in the visitation; 'E la stagione,' they would observe philosophically: 'It is the season'. Most Italians take comfort in the thought that manifestations, however unpleasant, are following a natural order, and are apt to say they are, even when they are not. But the visitors to Venice, waking with puffy eyelids and twisted bumpy lips, after perhaps many an hour spent crouching or kneeling under their mosquito nets, trying to make their bedside lamps shine into the dark folds where the mosquitoes lurked, were not so easily satisfied, and many of them took wing like their tormentors, and flew to mountain resorts, which were said to be above the mosquito line. The only section of the community who profited from the outbreak was the chemists, who did a roaring trade in oil of citronella, small coloured candles guaranteed to suffocate mosquitoes and other forms of insect-bane; it was before the days of Flit and DDT. But their triumph was short-lived for they were soon sold out—not only of preventives against the bites but even of remedies for them, and were reduced to fobbing off their customers with sunburn lotions and beauty preparations which, so they declared, would have the same effect as antiseptics.

To add to this misfortune a heat-wave of almost unexampled virulence struck the city. Indeed, it struck the whole Italian peninsula. Every day the local paper, the *Gazzettino*, and the national papers, the *Corriere della Sera* and the *Stampa*, published a list showing the

maximum and minimum temperatures of all the large towns in Italy, including Benghazi which then formed part of the Italian empire. Benghazi was always top with upwards of 40 degrees Centigrade; but whereas of the others, Rome, Milan, Naples, Florence and Bologna always had a maximum temperature higher than that of Venice, which never rose above 35, Venice always had the highest minimum temperature, for it never fell below 26. Shallow and tepid, the lagoon, which had no chance to cool off, embraced the city like a permanent and inescapable hot-water bottle. Sometimes the more mathematically-minded of the English and American tourists, those who were still capable of making the effort, might be seen at some café table, pencil in hand, making the complicated calculation that reduces Centigrade to Fahrenheit. 'Ninety-four today,' they would lament, 'one degree lower than yesterday, but the humidity is greater—eighty-nine per cent, only two degrees less than in New York.'

The nights seemed hotter than the days. In the afternoon the wind would veer from north to south, from the borino to the scirocco, and by six o'clock—the one tolerable moment of the day—it would be blowing lustily: the visitors snuffed it up, auguring each other a cool night: but by eight o'clock the breeze would have died down, and then the baking pavements and lukewarm canals gave off all the heat they had stored up during the hours of sunshine. Later the full moon would show its rim, fiery as a conflagration, behind the island of San Giorgio Maggiore, and slowly mount until the whole of its great disc, blood-red, and swollen as if it too had been mosquito-bitten, would rise above the roof-tops. Clouds surrounded it and sometimes streaked it, indigo clouds edged with rose, like the clouds in Tintoretto's pictures, making the hopeful think a storm was brewing; but they were only harbingers of heat, and presently the moon swung clear of them and climbed into the dark vault of the night, losing as it went its ruddy hue, changing from copper to amber, and at last to shining white, a waxen death-mask pitted with blue shadows.

Dining late on the terrace of his hotel, against which the ripples of the Grand Canal lapped softly, Mr Henry Elkington watched it, while he waited for his wife and daughter who, however late the hour, were always later. The terrace was the coolest place, as cool as any spot in Venice, he imagined; yet he felt the sweat collecting on his forehead and saw it glistening on the backs of his hands. Every now and then it would trickle stealthily down his chest and he knew, though he would not feel it, that it was also coursing down his back, for when he leant against the upholstered chair and then leant for-

ward, the chair stuck to his white linen coat. A dark patch must have formed there, an unsightly mark and one that would leave a stain; but at fifty-odd he didn't mind that as he would have minded twenty years ago. He minded the discomfort more, however, and grudged the physical effort of flipping at the mosquitoes. Guided to him unerringly by the red-shaded tablelamp, as by a beacon, they announced themselves with a venomous ping—where were they, exactly? His face and head and hands he could to some extent defend with whirlwind gyrations like those of a demented windmill; but his calves and ankles, which were their happiest hunting-ground, those he could not protect. And, tired by sleepless nights, his mind kept telling his sense of self-preservation that it would be better to give up the struggle, adopt a policy of appeasement and let the little creatures have their fling.

Apart from all this he wasn't feeling well; he had some psychosomatic disorder that made his flesh creep even when the mosquitoes were not stinging it. He felt as though his skin didn't quite fit him, it was loose in some places and tight in others; and much as, in one way, he welcomed every breath that blew, another part of his sensorium shrank from it. He was hot and cold by turns; perhaps he had a fever.

Hope stirred in him, however, for his wife, before she went to dress, had promised she would ring up Countess Bembo and say that after all they were afraid they would not be able to stay on for her party, two days hence. He, Henry, was not well, that was to be the excuse: the mosquitoes and the heat had got him down, and the three of them were departing on the morrow for the Dolomites. The Dolomites! The mere word, with its suggestion of fresh mountain air, mosquito-free, breathed new life into him and he called the waiter for another dry Martini.

He had had the greatest difficulty in persuading Maureen to take this step. Not that she was, normally, indifferent to the needs and even the whims of a husband who had given her almost everything she asked of life, except romance. She knew what was due to such a husband, and she did not grudge it him. But this was a special case. Countess Bembo was an important Venetian hostess, perhaps the most important, and her party was to be one of the highlights, perhaps the highlight, of the season. It would be a thousand pities to miss it. For herself she, Maureen, would not mind; but Annette would be so terribly disappointed. Annette was only twenty and it was her first visit to Venice. Venice had gone to her head; she could find no flaw in it. She wasn't worried by the heat and the mosquitoes, she thought them rather fun—part of the tremendous fun she was

having at the endless parties to which she was invited. Young men buzzed round her—Henry could not keep count of the Nino's and Nini's and Gigio's and Gigi's, or tell them apart, they were as like each other as mosquitoes; but he had to admit that they were good-looking and had excellent manners, and Annette obviously found them far more interesting and exciting than the young men she knew in England. Sailing, bathing, playing tennis, dancing, she went off with them for hours at a time. Henry was slightly worried by these absences, but Maureen seemed to know exactly how far her daughter should be chaperoned, and would draw the line, or not draw it, in circumstances that to Henry's thinking were precisely similar. One thing had always been clear: no conjunction of circumstances whatever must be allowed to prevent Annette's attendance at the Bembo's party.

This was the first time for days that they had dined alone. Annette was her father's darling as she was her mother's and Henry would not have dreamed of depriving her of a pleasure if he had not felt that his health was at stake. Those newspaper paragraphs grew every day more frequent: 'Colto da malore', struck down by sudden illness, this or that middle-aged man (they all seemed to be in the decade between fifty and sixty) had fallen down in the street and been taken to hospital, where he had either instantly expired or been adjudged curable in (at the least) twenty days. Sudden death or three weeks' confinement, three weeks' grilling in a Venetian hospital! Henry, who was of a full habit, trembled at the thought. Now, looking out at the Venetian night, at the gondolas passing below him, dipping and prancing, at the whole medley of small and large craft, hung with lanterns, some silent, some with solitary singers, some with concert parties thrumming mandolins, he tried to recapture the fascination, the sense of heady joy, that the scene had once held for him. But now it spoke to him of nothing but the wish to get away and slake his suffering, sweltering body in the cool air of the mountains.

There was a touch on his shoulder, light as a mosquito settling, and he looked up into Annette's radiant face. 'Mummy's just coming,' she said.

This was not quite true. Maureen appeared about ten minutes later. Henry could not tell from her expression what the verdict was to be: Maureen seldom introduced an important topic until the conversation had turned on other matters. Then unobtrusively she would slip it in. While they confidently munched their scampi and Henry was toying with his grilled sole, Maureen remarked:

'I didn't forget to telephone to Loredana Bembo, Henry dear.'

Hope surged up in him.

'Oh, and what did she say?'

'She couldn't have been sweeter about it. First she said she was frightfully sorry you were feeling the heat—she sent you all sorts of affectionate messages.'

Henry's heart sank.

'And she said she entirely understood your wanting to go away. She wished she could herself. But Henry, she *implored* us not to fail her. She said that so many people had chucked—because of the heat, you know, and the mosquitoes—that it would hardly be a party at all—about thirty people for dinner at the most. She said that except for us there wasn't a cat in Venice.'

'I'm not sure that I like that,' said Henry with a feeble attempt at jocularity.

'Well, you know what she meant. And it is hard on her, isn't it, when she's made so many preparations. And she said the nicest things about Annette. I really don't think we could let her down now—do you, darling?'

'Perhaps not,' said Henry doubtfully.

'And oh, Henry—I nearly forgot—she said you needn't be afraid of the mosquitoes because there wouldn't be any. She's thought of the most amusing way of keeping them out. She thought of it entirely for you, she said. It's to be a secret until the evening of the party.'

Henry realized that there was nothing for it but to give way with a good grace.

Somehow or other he managed to survive the next two days, but not unscathed, however. Taking his morning stroll to the flower-shop in San Stefano (he had to renew the flowers in their sitting-room every day, for after twenty-four hours they had wilted from the heat) he suddenly felt dizzy: the sun seemed to strike right through him, like a sword, as if the proper defences of his body had ceased to operate. Colto da malore! In a panic he looked about for shade but there was none: the sun stood right over the long, acorn-shaped campo. Then he espied an awning and staggered to it. Standing in its exiguous shadow he felt as a shipwrecked man might feel on a rock, with the ocean raging round him. But where next? Frightened though he was, he didn't want to risk the moral defeat of going back without the flowers: besides, Maureen would be so disappointed. Half way to the shop a projecting doorway lent a modicum of shade. He gained it, and gaining it regained some of his lost confidence. It was all nerves! But no, it wasn't, for scanning the campo he saw other pedestrians pursuing the same policy as his; avoiding the torrid centre where the statue was, they were slinking round the circum-

ference, hurrying from one island of shade to the next. Still, none of them dropped down dead, and soon he plucked up courage, and almost swaggered into the flower-shop, where the flowers were being sprayed with jets of water and the sudden coolness was unbelievably delicious.

But he didn't go out again that day till after sundown, and the next day, the day of the party, which dawned as hot as noon, he gave the flowers a miss and didn't go out at all until their gondola drew up to the brass-railed landing raft and Maureen said to the gondoliers 'Palazzo Bembo, sa!' as if, on that evening, there could only be one destination.

Casa, Maureen should have said; house, not palace. In some ways the Bembo's were old-fashioned, and affected the nomenclature of an earlier day than that in which the houses of patrician Venetian families came to be styled palazzos. Theirs was one of the few ancestral homes in Venice inhabited entirely by the family who built it and kept up in appropriate state. This evening that state had been much augmented. If there was not a powdered footman on every step of the grand staircase, there were a formidable number, all the same; and if they were not professional footmen, but farm-workers imported from the Bembo's country estate and put into livery, the effect was none the less magnificent. Passing them on the staircase, and vaguely noting their white-gloved hands and red, perspiring faces, Henry felt that afflatus of the spirit which earthly glory sometimes brings. Other Venetians gave parties that were like parties everywhere; but the Bembo's party had its special cachet.

Light-headed but heavy-footed he stumbled, and clutched at the plaited rope of crimson silk that, threaded through stylized hands of polished brass, hung in festoons against the wall. Good luck! said somebody. A step or two ahead of and above him were Maureen and Annette: what energy was displayed in their sprightly springy tread! His ankles were swollen under his black socks, and the slight exertion of climbing the staircase was bringing the sweat out on his back.

In an ante-room off the sala stood Loredana Bembo, an imposing figure, splendid in jewels, and by her side her husband, a short thick-set, baldish man, but with an unmistakable air of authority about him. 'It was so good of you to come,' she said to Henry. 'And I promise you a hundred lire for every mosquito-bite you get tonight.' A hundred lire was something in those days; it will pay me to get a bite or two, thought Henry, and waited for the buzz, but it didn't come, and when at last they all sat down to dinner, he saw why; the windows were defended by thin metal grilles, of mesh so fine that

even a mosquito couldn't find its way through. He had seen them before, of course; his own sitting-room in the hotel was fitted with them. They couldn't be the secret Countess Bembo had spoken of.

He wasn't sitting next to her, an Ambassador and a man of title occupied these coveted positions. Of his two neighbours, one was an Italian, one an Englishwoman who always came to Venice at this time.

'What is Countess Bembo's secret?' he asked her. 'Or haven't you heard of it?'

'There is something,' she said.

'Do you know what?'

She shook her head. 'Loredana always has something up her sleeve,' she said. 'Let's hope it won't be too peculiar.'

A member of one aristocratic Venetian family, married into another, Loredana Bembo was a law unto herself. Conventional when she chose to be, if the fit took her she would flout convention. At such times a reckless look would come into her eyes. 'E originale,' her friends said of her, 'she is an eccentric,' and if they sometimes criticized her they were also proud of and a little afraid of her. What she said went, what she did got by.

The champagne flowed and as fast as Henry drank it, his labouring, overheated skin discharged it. He dabbed his neck, his face, his hands. Perhaps it would have been wiser not to drink, but he could not forgo the momentary relief each swallow brought him—the immediate physical relief, and the deliverance from his nervous premonitions. All nerves they were: tomorrow this time he would be at Merano breathing freely. Drinking freely he could better imagine that paradise. The faces opposite him were a blur, but one was Maureen's, and another, further to the left, between a Nino and a Gigi who were both talking to her at once, was Annette's.

At last the chairs scraped on the smooth terrazzo and they left the dining room, in Continental fashion, the men and women together, a little group of white shirt fronts and bare shoulders. Up they went, upstairs into the second sala, for the Palazzo Bembo had two, two great galleries that ran the whole length of the building. Breasting the ascent, however, they stopped, as a crowd stops, automatically, almost barging into each other: and little cries broke out and circled over Henry's head. 'Ah, che bello!' As they moved on and up, these exclamations, and others like them, screams and trills and chirrupings of delight, went on, and Henry, reaching the top, saw what it was that had provoked them, though for a moment he didn't quite take in what it meant. He blinked and looked again: what was it, this array of snowy surfaces, booths, tents, tabernacles, this ghostly en-

campment under the great chandelier? Then, drawing nearer, he saw: it was an encampment, an encampment of mosquito-nets. Following the others' lead, Henry began to circulate among them. They were of all shapes and sizes, some square, some domed and circular, some tapering to a peak like army tents. To one and all gaily coloured pennons were attached, indicating their purpose. Under the chandelier, where the light was brightest, was pitched a cluster of square tents meant for bridge, as their label, 'Per far una partita', testified. Beyond them, further from the light, round and square forms alternating, were other tents reserved for conversation: 'Per far la conversazione', was the device they bore. Beyond them, where the light was fainter, was ranged another group, only big enough to hold two armchairs apiece: 'Per far l'amore' was the legend that these temptingly displayed. A gasp went up; had Loredana gone too far this time? And beyond these again, one in each corner of the room flanking the tall gothic windows, where the light from the chandelier hardly reached them, almost out of sight, were two much smaller refuges. These at once aroused the curiosity of the guests: what could their purpose be? They peered and peered at the labels, which were not coloured or cut into fantastic shapes, but sober rectangles of white cardboard, with plain black lettering on them. Then there was a chuckle, which sooner or later was taken up by everyone: 'Per i misantropi', they read, and soon the words were on every lip.

The first tents to be occupied were the bridge tents: the impatient players made straight for them, and within a minute or two the cards were being dealt. If some of the guests were too slow off the mark, and lost their places at the bridge-tables, they concealed their disappointment and joined the conversationalists. One or two paired off, and somewhat sheepishly and defiantly made for the tents of love: cries of encouragement followed after them. As far as Henry could make out, no man or woman chose to be self-proclaimed a misanthrope: the two lone tents remained unoccupied. But he had scarcely time to see, for it was like a game of musical chairs—one had to find one's seat or be left standing, and the idea of standing was much less bearable to Henry even than the idea of talking. 'Per far la conversazione!' There was a vacancy: in he went and sank down in a chair. There were iced drinks in misted glasses on the table, and round it three people whom he knew quite well: it might have been much worse.

He it was who drew together the tent-flaps and tied them with gay bows of scarlet ribbon: if the tents were not mosquito-proof, as he suspected, they looked as if they were, which was a great thing: he could relax, he needn't flap and flip, and screw his face up, or make

other uncivilized gestures of the mosquito-ridden. Outside, no doubt, the creatures hummed, they must, for at both ends of the sala the windows stood wide open, and with two glittering chandeliers to guide them they couldn't miss their way. No, it wasn't too bad. The muslin kept out some of the air, of course, but how clever of Loredana to have thought of it all! She had turned those twin plagues, the heat and the mosquitoes, neither of which was funny in itself, into a joke. She had converted them into a social asset; she had countered them with a creation that was beautiful and strange. The party would be long remembered.

Fuddled though he was, and ready to accept unreality, Henry began to wonder where, in what muslin arbours, Annette and Maureen had taken shelter. The first question was quickly answered. Faintly, from below, came strains of a dance-band.

'You didn't know?' said someone. 'They're coming in after dinner to dance, a whole crowd of them. It's we old stagers who are sitting up here.' He was an Italian and 'vecchietti' was the word he used: 'a little old', such a nice word, there was no equivalent for it in English, we were less considerate to old age. Henry didn't mind being a vecchietto. So Annette was accounted for: she would be downstairs dancing with a Nino, or a Nini, a Gigio or a Gigi. She would be sure to be enjoying herself.

But Maureen? He looked about him. Even here where the light from the chandelier was fairly strong, you couldn't very well see through the muslin; you could see the shadowy shapes of other tents, but you couldn't tell who was inside them; in the case of those further away, nearer the windows, you couldn't tell if anyone was inside them. Maureen was so efficient, so practised socially; she would have found her niche—not with the bridge-players, for she wasn't one, not—he smiled to himself—in one of the *temples d'amour*, for that didn't interest her—she would be taking part in another conversation-piece, perhaps next door to his. While with the surface of his mind he gossiped with his fellow guests his inner ear was alert for the inflexions of Maureen's voice; and so intent was he on listening that he didn't see the figure that more than once passed by his curtain wall, stopping and peering in and circling round; and it was one of the others who first saw her and said, 'Guardi, Enrico, isn't that your wife who goes in search of you?' At once Henry jumped up and excusing himself untied the ribbons and let himself out into the air.

'What is it?' he said, moving with her into a space between the tents that was out of earshot. 'Anything I can do?'

'Darling, I've got a splitting headache,' she answered. 'I really

think I must go back. It came on suddenly—it's the heat I suppose. But I don't want to spoil Annette's fun, she's having the time of her life, and I don't want Loredana to know, she has so much on her hands already. So I'll just slip out—she'll never notice—and Luigi and Emilio can take me back to the hotel.'

'I'll go with you,' Henry said.

'No, darling, don't do that. What I should like you to do, if you don't mind, is to wait for Annette and bring her home. When you go you can explain to Loredana and make my apologies. I know it's a frightful bore and you're not feeling well either—but just this once! It really wouldn't do to let Annette go back alone, we know she can be trusted but people would talk about it. I hate to ask you to, but it won't be for long—what time is it?'

'Just twelve,' said Henry. 'There's the Marangona.'

They listened, and above the hubbub of voices and dance music they heard the solemn sound of the great bell tolling midnight.

'I won't tell Annette that I'm going,' Maureen said, 'and don't you tell her either; it might spoil her fun. I'll send the gondoliers straight back and tell them to wait for you. Now we mustn't be seen talking together any more or it will look odd.' Before Henry could speak she had turned away, and with slight inclinations of her head to left and right was making for the staircase.

Henry made a movement to follow her and then turned back. She knew her own mind, no one better. But what should he do? Irresolutely he looked towards the tent he had left—but was it the same tent? He couldn't be sure, and anyhow another man had taken his place, leaving the flap open. Several of the tents had their flaps open, the occupants preferring air and light to immunity from mosquitoes. He picked his way among the tents. Which one should he invade? They all seemed full. Even the bowers of love, which were more opaque than the others, had darker shadows in them. He was shut out! For a moment he felt as a wandering Arab might, whose tribe had exiled him. But he mustn't stand there moping: he would go down and watch the dancers.

Plenty of other guests were doing the same: on gilt chairs and settees they lined the walls; behind them the crimson brocade stretched upwards to the ceiling of painted beams; pictures and mirrors hung above them. His tired mind could not synthesize the scene. Better try to find Annette—ah, here she was, on the arm, or in the arms, of a young man. Her face was rapt and expressionless: she passed within a foot of Henry without seeing him. She was in another world, a world of youth into which he could not penetrate—a world which

jealously guarded its own feelings, especially from lonely wall-flower fathers. The music whined and groaned and thumped and stammered. Where was she now? There were other rooms, rooms for sitting out in, that led off the sala. He mustn't seem curious about her, he mustn't feel curious about her, she didn't belong to him, she belonged to all those young men, the Nino's, Nini's, Gigio's and Gigi's, and the emotions they aroused in her: emotions which sometimes made her youthful face look stern.

Here she was again, on another arm, this time; and this time her face was not so much rapt as set, and in the lines of her body there was the tautness of strain, such as you see in a plant that is being forced to grow in a shape it doesn't like. Was she a captive? He thought her eyes met his, and longed to say, 'Oh please come here and talk to me a moment!' But he must not; if she had been in another continent she could not have been further from him.

At most times she could see a joke as well as anyone, indeed she often laughed when he saw nothing to laugh at. But where her young men were concerned she was, it seemed to him, as impervious both to humour and to reason, as her mother was in matters of social etiquette and observance. She took it all with deadly seriousness, even when she was laughing and flirting with her swains; and she resented any comment on her conduct, however sympathetic and well-meant.

'Does she really know what she is doing?' he had once asked her mother. 'She seems to think that love today is different from love at any other time.'

'Oh, Annette's all right,' Maureen replied. 'Besides, there's safety in numbers. We mustn't interfere, we must let her find her feet. If she was really serious about anyone, I should know.'

'Yes, but this isn't England,' Henry said. 'Autres pays, autres mœurs.'

Maureen shook her head. 'We mustn't spoil her fun,' she said. It had become a slogan.

Henry did not like watching people dance, it pricked him with nostalgia and a sense of guilt that he, too, was not dancing; so after a while he went upstairs again. This time he spied a breach in one of the muslin fortresses: it widened, a head emerged and a voice urged him to come in. He obeyed. The flap was folded to, the bows were tied, the outside world withdrew. But it was only a brief respite. The other man of the trio looked at his watch: 'Why, it's two o'clock,' he said. 'Dobbiamo filare—we must be off!' The warmth and graciousness of their farewells made Henry feel more lonely than before. Again he descended to the ballroom, this time he would risk

Annette's displeasure, beard the Nino's and the Gigio's and beg her to come back. 'Your mother isn't well!' — that should be his plea. But this time he couldn't see her in the milling throng; she had vanished: face after beautiful face looked blankly down at his. Perhaps Loredana knows where she is, he thought, and diffidently approached his hostess where, fresh and animated as five hours ago, she sat, magnetizing the men on either side of her: but just out of range of her conscious glance he stopped. With a hundred or more guests about her, how could she know where Annette was? And it would be a clumsy tactless question anyway; how Annette would hate the notion of a search party, of being run to earth! And he might have to explain, prematurely, about Maureen, too. So he waved to his hostess as gaily as he could, and she shouted something out to him: Venetians always shouted at you — in ballrooms as well as from bridges — something he couldn't catch: was it goodnight? Did she think he was taking his leave? Making it as inconspicuous as possible? He couldn't tell, and slowly, availing himself of the silken rope, he climbed to the upper gallery.

It was in semi-darkness; in the splendid chandeliers only a few lights sparkled. Had all the non-dancing guests, the 'vecchiotti', departed? The encampment hadn't been dismantled; nothing had been put straight: the servants had left the task of tidying till the morning. Peering in, he saw the cards scattered on the card-tables. The more distant tents, the bowers of love, he could hardly see, still less tell whether they were tenanted. He passed by them towards the windows and saw, with a sudden rush of longing, the two tents set apart for the misanthropes. Either would be a refuge. He chose the farther one, in the darker corner; once inside, he felt rather than saw that he was its first occupant. Draw the flaps and make them fast; let the mosquitoes sing outside! Dimly the thud and whine of the music reached him; it had no power to disturb him now: it was a lullaby. Soon he fell asleep.

He dreamed and in his dream he was still looking for someone, but it wasn't here, it was in the bright sunshine among the bathing huts and cabins of the Lido. The search was most embarrassing, for all the cabins had their blinds drawn down, and every time he knocked an angry voice said, 'Who's that? You can't come in.' 'I'm looking for my daughter, Annette,' he explained. 'She's a tall girl, dark, and rather pretty. I want to take her home. Have you seen her?' 'We have seen her,' the voice replied, 'but she doesn't want to go home, and she'll be angry if you try to find her. Nino and Nini and Gigio and Gigi are looking after her. She has her own life to live, you know.' 'Yes,' said Henry, 'but her mother is anxious about her. She doesn't

want her to go home alone—it wouldn't do. People would talk about her. Please tell me where she is.' 'She's somewhere here,' the voice said grudgingly, 'but you won't be able to get in because the door's locked. This is a *temple d'amour*, so please leave us in peace.'

Oddly enough Henry knew at once which door the speaker meant and went straight to it. But now he was carrying some flowers, flowers he had bought in the Campo San Stefano that morning, and he was glad of this because they gave him an excuse. He knocked and said very humbly, 'Please let me in, Annette, and don't be angry with me: I've only come to give you these flowers—you can wear them in your hair or anywhere you like, but you needn't wear them at all if you don't want to. Not everyone likes flowers.' But though he knew she was inside she didn't answer, and he saw that the flowers were withering in his hands.

He wasn't really asleep, he was only dozing, and the dream kept repeating itself in other sets of circumstances which were much less clear than they had been in the first one, until at last the visual aspects of the dream grew indistinct and only the sense of frustrated search remained.

When he awoke he thought he was in bed, his own bed with the mosquito-curtains round him. Gradually he remembered, and his first sensation was one of relief: he had outwitted Time and all those boring hours of waiting, they had slipped past his tired consciousness and now Annette would be ready and perhaps waiting to be taken home—and not best pleased at being kept waiting. He must go to her at once. For a moment that seemed as easy as it would have in a dream: then full awareness of his situation dawned on him. He was here in the Palazzo Bembo and it was quite dark: too dark to see his wrist-watch. He struck a match: it showed a quarter to five. He let himself out into the open, and as his eyes got used to the darkness saw around him the ghostly forms of the encampment, looking strangely large and solid. No sound came from any part of the building. He had been forgotten, that was it. The ball was over and in the general concourse of good-byes his absence had been overlooked. Someone would have taken Annette back; it only remained for him to go back too.

All this was something to be thankful for. But when he began to think about his situation, it didn't seem so simple. To begin with, how was he to get out of the house? And how, if discovered, would he explain himself? Would he be mistaken for a burglar? And how would he get home? Annette would have taken the gondola. He would have to walk, and he wasn't sure he knew the way.

He went to the window and leaned out. It looked on to a garden, a

square garden, quite large, one of the few gardens in Venice. Dawn was not far away: he could see the Renaissance pavilion at the end, the shadows of night still dark between its columns. Nothing stirred, though he could hear the splash of the fountain in the centre. Would he have to go through the garden to get out? He had never approached the Palazzo Bembo on foot. Somewhere, he supposed, there must be a narrow *calle*, an alleyway that led to the main street. But where?

Baffled, he turned away from the window and, treading cautiously between the tents—afraid of catching his foot in one and tearing it down—he made his way to the other end of the great sala. Light met him as he went, the accumulated radiance of the lamps of the Grand Canal. He leaned out of the window, and drank in the familiar scene. How beautiful it was—Venice asleep! Perhaps this was the only hour out of the twenty-four when no one was abroad.

His roving, loving eye at last looked downwards. Moored to the blue *pali*, which looked curiously foreshortened from above, was a gondola. The gondoliers, in their white ducks and blue sashes, were asleep: one curled up on the poop, the other stretched out in the hold: each was using his curved arm as a pillow. Whose gondola could it be? Why, it was his—his gondola, with Luigi and Emilio in it. But why were they there, why hadn't they gone home to bed?

A solution occurred to him. If they had taken Annette to the hotel, as they must have, probably accompanied by some cavalier—Annette's young men always accepted a lift—she might have sent them back to fetch her father. She would have looked for him, no doubt, before she left. But would she? Assuming she had remembered him at all, would she not have concluded that he had left the party earlier, with her mother, and dismissed the gondola when she reached the hotel? Or could it be that the party wasn't really over and she was still somewhere about?

He stole downstairs into the lower sala. All was in darkness there, but he sensed its disarray—the debris of the party without the party spirit. His flesh creeping as if from contact with something dirty, he returned to the upper sala, and on an impulse shouted down the palace wall, as loudly as any Venetian could have,

'Luigi!'

When he had repeated it a few times there was a movement in the boat, and with sighs of escaping sleep, almost as loud as steam, the gondoliers rose to their feet and looked incredulously upwards.

'Have you seen the signorina?' he shouted in Italian.

'Nossignore.'

'Didn't you take her home?'

'Nossignore.'

'How did she go home then?'

'She must have gone on foot.'

She might have done, but was it likely? Telling the gondoliers to wait—for waiting, even more than rowing, was their *métier*—he tried to think it out. She might have thought it fun to walk, but would she have forgotten the gondola? Except where her boy-friends were concerned, Annette wasn't inconsiderate. It would have been very inconsiderate to leave Emilio and Luigi out all night.

His musing steps had brought him back to the encampment. Unwillingly he re-entered its precincts. How alien it was. Like something conjured up by an enchanter—purposeless, yet with a potent personality of its own, and not a pleasant one: a personality that recalled the lawless deeds of desert warfare. He was careful not to brush against the muslin fabrics. Each tent had its flap ajar—all the birds had flown. But no, one tent was shut. As though by compulsion he approached it. It was shut, and there were two other odd things about it. The tent was laced as tightly as a shoe, but the scarlet bows were tied on the outside, not the inside; and its pennon had been torn off, torn roughly off, for where the join had been a dark rent showed, and if he peeped through it—

He didn't peep but stood at gaze, obsessed more deeply every moment by a sense of momentousness that was totally devoid of meaning. If, as he felt it might, the secret, the solution, lay inside the tent—

It did lie inside, sprawled over the two chairs, but he would not let himself believe, and here the darkness helped him; for it wasn't growing lighter with the opening day, it was going back to night. Needing air and a moment to confirm his unbelief he staggered to the window, the one that overlooked the garden, and there he saw the massy thundercloud piled high against the light and heard without heeding it the rumble of the storm that was to end the heat-wave. The lightning flashed and flashed again; the mirrors on the walls reflected it; a sudden gust blew in—a solid wall of wind that struck the tents and bent them all one way, like spectres fleeing. A flash lit up the whole length of the sala. He could not shirk his duty any longer, his duty as a man and as a father. Something might still be done to help, to reanimate, to bring back—But nothing could be done; around the darkening neck the scarlet fork-tailed pennon had been tied too tight. Another flash told him no more than he knew already: but the next lit up the legend on the noose. Two words were missing, hidden by the strangler's knot, but the operative word was there, the last one, and his memory supplied the rest: *Per far l'amore*, to make love.

GWYN WILLIAMS

The Ploughman

Translated from the 14th century Welsh of Iolo Goch

When the world's folk, one day of freedom,
the lively host of Christendom,
show their works before God
the beloved Lord (fine true words)
on the great mountain of Olivet,
where they will all be judged,
the labourer, the meadow traveller,
will tell a simple, cheerful tale.
The lively God is generous:
if a man has given God offering and tithe,
then a good soul directly
he'll pay to God and merit bliss.
The worker in the bright meadow
easily trusts to the Lord God.
Most properly his almsgiving
and hospitality are for all.
He'll speak his mind only on ploughs;
he hates dissension where he works.
He'll make and follow no war,
he'll oppress no one for his goods,
he's never brutal with us
nor will he pursue false claims.
Suffering is his seemly way,
yet there's no life without him.
He finds it many times pleasanter,
and I think no worse of him,
to grip in his placid way
the crooked plough and the goad
than if he were wrecking a tower
in the guise of a ravaging Arthur.

THE PLOUGHMAN

Without his work there's no
Christ's sacrifice to feed our faith,
and without him no pope
or emperor can keep alive,
no wine-giving, sprightly king
of notable prudence, no living man.
The lucid old Elucidarium
put it thus happily,
'Blessed is he who through his youth
holds in his hands the plough.'
It's a cradle tearing the smooth long broom,
a fishing basket lacing the field,
a holy image of dear praise,
a heron opening a quick furrow,
a basket for the wild earth, now to be tamed
in honoured, coultured order;
a gander of the wild acres,
grain will come of its true skill.
It fetches crops from the rich earth,
it's a good beast biting the ground.
It must have its knife and its board
and its food right under its thigh.
It goes unwillingly through stones,
it skins the field with leg outstretched.
Its head is ever employed
on a fair way beneath oxen's feet.
It has often sung its hymn,
it loves to follow the plough chain.
A root-breaker of valley growth,
it stretches a stiff neck out;
tough-headed train-bearer,
its wooden shank scatters the earth.
Hu Gadarn, lord of a lively people,
a king who gave wine for verse,
emperor of land and seas,
Constantinople's golden constable,
after defeat took up
the nimble, fine-beamed plough,
for this hale, host-scattering lord,
this great leader never sought bread
but, so well instructed was he,
by his own labour. This gifted eagle
wished to show to the proud

GWYN WILLIAMS

and to the wisely humble that
in the true-jewelled Father's sight
one craft was best, as a true sign
that ploughing is a scholarship.
Where there's belief and baptism
and everyone upholding the faith,
the Lord God's hand on this best of men
and Mary's hand on every ploughman!



Katerina Wilczynski: Fantasia—Trafalgar Square

JOCELYN BROOKE

The Wrong Side of the Blanket

A Letter to a Nephew



Dear John,

You have asked me to give some account of my 'literary ancestors': a ticklish job, as I'm sure you'll admit, and one which, it seems to me, no writer should attempt till he is an octogenarian. A writer can seldom be wholly detached towards his own work, and in attempting the delicate task of tracing his literary ancestry, he will be liable to fall into the same pitfalls of snobbery and wishful-thinking as any other amateur genealogist. He will tend, for instance, to emphasize the influence of those writers whom he most admires (or whom it is fashionable to admire), while keeping silent about others whom he has learnt to despise or, perhaps, conveniently to forget; and he will almost certainly be tempted to claim descent from at least one—if not more—of the classic exponents of English prose. You know the sort of thing: Mr X, for instance—that talented novelist and *bellelettriste*—has acknowledged his lifelong debt to De Quincey and Sir Thomas Browne; while Miss Y's sensitive and flexible prose-style, so she assures us, was formed by her early study of the seventeenth century divines, and by her subsequent devotion to the novels of Henry James.

Such pronouncements as these are apt to fill me with a profound sense of inferiority; for I, alas, can claim no such distinguished forebears. I may as well confess, right away, that I am extremely ill-read in English Literature; I am, in fact, a child of my own century, and a literary parvenu. I was not in the least precocious: at my prep school my favourite authors were Sapper, Baroness Orczy and Herbert Jenkins (the *Bindle* books). In the end-of-term exams one used to get asked such questions as: 'In what books (by which authors) do the following occur: Becky Sharp, Mr Micawber, Mr Rochester,' etc., etc. Oddly enough, I almost always knew the answers—a fact which, today, I find hard to explain, for, though I loved reading, I wasn't

really a literary little boy at all, and most certainly hadn't, at that date, read Thackeray, Dickens or the Brontës. I can only conclude—rather shamefacedly—that I was already something of a literary snob, with a knack of picking up information about books which I had no intention of tackling myself.

Later, during my first two years at Bedales, I read as many modern novels as I could get hold of: Wells, Hugh Walpole, May Sinclair, Philip Gibbs, E. F. Benson and Sheila Kaye-Smith are the names I chiefly remember. I still liked thrillers, but I preferred, from snobbery, to be seen reading novels which—as I supposed—were 'good literature'. I did dip into Dickens, but found him heavy-going and 'old-fashioned', except in bits; Scott was unreadable, so was Thackeray; I pretended to like Jane Austen, but secretly thought her a bit of a bore. Among the modern writers I have mentioned, Miss Kaye-Smith made a particular appeal to me, because she wrote about a countryside which I knew; by this time, I had begun to write novels myself (I wrote dozens while I was still at school), and two or three of these still survive in manuscript; in so far as any 'influences' can be detected, I suppose that my style owed most, in those days, to Miss Kaye-Smith, Hugh Walpole and Sir Philip Gibbs. A manuscript of a slightly later date, however, shows a marked—indeed a revolutionary—change; for I had suddenly, at the age of about fifteen-and-a-half, discovered Aldous Huxley, and my conversion (there is really no other word for it) had been immediate and complete.

The younger generation, today, must find it hard to understand the immense influence which Huxley exerted in the twenties. He was not, after all, an innovator, in the sense that one applies the term to Joyce or Virginia Woolf; yet I suppose there must be few writers of my generation who didn't, at one time or another, fall under his spell. Like Wells before him (though we didn't, perhaps, realize it at the time), Huxley was primarily a popularizer; and not the least of his attractions was the appeal which he made to our latent intellectual snobbery. In his early books he was wont to pepper his pages with the names of painters, writers, etc., of whom one had never heard, with the omniscient and condescending air of the gossip-writer who refers (or used to refer, in those days) to 'Lady So-and-so, who *of course*. . .'. Huxley's novels and essays, in fact, had precisely the effect upon a would-be highbrow of sixteen as the *Tatler* or *Sketch* may be supposed to have upon the suburban housewife: *of course* one had heard all about Crébillon fils or Taddeo da Poggibonsi—or, if one hadn't, then it was high time one set about repairing the omission.

In my own case, Huxley was to me what Huysmans was to Dorian

Gray: I was fatally seduced, not so much by his air of omniscience and 'sophistication', nor even by his uninhibited attitude to sex (*Antic Hay* was considered very shocking in those days), as by his style which, deriving as it did from unfamiliar models (French, for the most part), was in startling contrast to the sort of prose with which I was familiar. I was transported, as it were, to a new world: the effect was as sudden and dramatic as that moment when, after a clouded and snow-bound journey across Europe, one emerges from the Simplon into the dazzling sunlight of an Italian spring. Walpole, E. F. Benson, even Miss Kaye-Smith herself—all the novelists I had been reading seemed to me suddenly as dim and depressing as an English winter.

From Huxley I went on to the Nineties: the transition was natural enough, for there is a distinctly ninetyish streak in Huxley's earlier prose; his young heroes, in spite of being so conscientiously 'in the movement', are 'a little weary', and seem the lineal descendants of Dowson and Arthur Symons. I became, at this time, a little weary myself, and developed a taste for dying falls and recondite or archaic words; I was agreeably thrilled by *Dorian Gray*, but its influence, I think, was only transient.

The Huxleyan poison continued to circulate in my veins for the next ten years or more; indeed, I think I have never succeeded in excreting it wholly from my system. To this day, I am liable—like Edgar Naylor in *The Rock Pool*—to find that the virus is still unexpectedly working, and that I have lapsed yet again, from force of long habit, into what Connolly calls the 'competent intellectual vulgarity' of my youthful hero.

I discovered Proust at Oxford. If Huxley had seemed excitingly 'different', and alien from my own former tastes and preoccupations, Proust seemed a kind of extended and glorified version of myself. Reading *Swann*, I can remember saying to myself: 'But this is me'. *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* was, I decided, not only the novel-to-end-all-novels, but, more especially, my novel—a book which might have been written for myself alone, and which, as I read on, seemed miraculously to enlarge and amplify my own personality. For the next few years, I was almost exclusively absorbed in it. Such was my obsession with the Proustian universe, that at times I hardly distinguished it, I think, from the real world about me; I identified myself as nearly as possible with the young Marcel and, if I didn't precisely model my life on his (which, after all, would have been rather difficult for a middle-class young Englishman with not much money), I saw my own existence, psychologically speaking, almost wholly in Proustian terms. I tended, for instance, to exag-

gerate my own latent hypochondria (though in fact I was perfectly healthy); and often enough some episode in my daily life—a meeting with a friend, known at an earlier period, and re-encountered in wholly different circumstances—would strike me as significantly ‘Proustian’, and would thereby acquire an importance which it would otherwise have entirely lacked.

Just as I had once tried to imitate Huxley, so now—with unfortunate and perhaps comical results—did I try my best to write like Proust. But the Proustian influence, if it survives in my published writings, is less stylistic, I think, than conceptual; I am not much good at very long sentences, and it is Proust’s obsession with Time which remains with me as the chief legacy of those years: not merely, I think, the nostalgia for childhood, but rather the treatment of subsequent events *seen in relation to childhood*, the attempt to link up the successive phases of my own life with the child’s naïve and unbiased vision.

Other, lesser influences were Norman Douglas, Firbank and the writers who, to a greater or lesser extent, derived from them—for example, the early novels of Evelyn Waugh. Perhaps, too, I owe a little to Osbert Sitwell, whom I began to read while still at school, and whose long-short stories I greatly admired—particularly *Low Tide*, which I still think one of his finest achievements. Later came Christopher Isherwood, whose easy, colloquial prose provided a much-needed corrective to the ‘mandarin’ styles of Proust and Huxley. His ‘tea-tabling’ method, as he calls it—the reduction of stirring or dramatic events to the scale of a drawing-room comedy—itself owes something to E. M. Forster, for whom I have an unbounded admiration, though I am not aware of being directly influenced by him; nor, for that matter, have I ever consciously tried to imitate Isherwood, though I think I am greatly in his debt.

I have been accused of imitating Kafka, though I can cross my heart and say that I have never, as yet, succeeded in getting through one of his novels. The Kafka influence has, I suspect, been ‘in the air’ for so long, that one has absorbed it indirectly—perhaps through the medium of more recent Kafkaesque writers, such as Rex Warner (who, I am told, had not yet read Kafka himself when he wrote *The Wild Goose Chase*). I suspect, too, that in my novel *The Scapegoat* there are echoes of Arthur Machen (a much underrated writer), and elsewhere, perhaps, of John Cowper Powys. Nor, by the way, must I omit to mention Beatrix Potter, whose books I adored as a child, and still re-read with pleasure. To say that I was influenced by the Peter Rabbit books is not a mere piece of whimsy: several of them, favourites in childhood, have continued to haunt me through-

THE WRONG SIDE OF THE BLANKET

out my grown-up life—*Pigling Bland*, for instance, in which the little pig, on his way to market, gets lost in a wood, at nightfall, in a strange countryside. It is a situation which, transposed into human terms, is apt to recur frequently in my own books, and which, though it may derive, in part, from other and later sources, I still associate with the immense impression made upon me by Beatrix Potter's story.

Like a good many writers (or so I suspect), I suffer from a perpetual, nagging awareness that my books are not the sort of books I most wanted to write when I was young. At fifteen, I envisaged long, romantic novels about the English countryside, full of juicy descriptive passages in the style of Miss Kaye-Smith; at twenty, I should have liked to write—and did indeed write, though it never, thank goodness, found a publisher—a 'sophisticated' novel (by Waugh out of Huxley) all about nightclubs and wild parties. Thereafter, for the next ten years or so, I remained a pious and rather bigoted Proustian, dedicated to the task of writing an enormous *roman fleuve* even longer and more self-revealing than that of Proust himself. This *magnum opus*, needless to say, never got itself written—or even, alas, begun; and my published books, in consequence, seem to me trivial and unsatisfactory by comparison—a series of extended footnotes, as it were, to that unwritten masterpiece.

Beatrix Potter, Huxley, Proust, Firbank, Isherwood—it's not a very impressive or revealing list; but it's the best I can do, I'm afraid, in the way of literary genealogizing. I was born—let's face it—on the wrong side of the literary blanket: congenitally lazy, and fatally beglamoured by what is new and exciting, I am aware of vast *lacunae* in my education—omissions which will probably never now be repaired. Twenty-five years ago, there was some excuse, perhaps, for concentrating on contemporary writing to the exclusion of what examiners call 'required reading'. Joyce, Lawrence, Hemingway, Virginia Woolf were at the height of their powers—or at any rate still writing; and a new *avant garde* (Auden and Co.) was already fluttering the literary dovecotes. Nowadays, I imagine, the young writer has no such convenient alibi, for we are living in an age of 'consolidation', with no *avant garde* to flutter anybody. To me the intellectual climate of today seems a great deal bleaker and less stimulating than when I was young; but this, in itself, may prove an advantage, for writers can suffer as much from an excess of stimulation as from the lack of it.

Your affectionate uncle,
Jocelyn.

STEPHEN GARDINER

Two Poems

THE EGOIST

Flowers died when he was about.
They turned from him
As he stood in doubt
Fingering his chin, unaware,
Preoccupied with
Blossom more beautiful elsewhere.

He forgot to put the water in:
Preferred to stand entranced
(While their stalks grew thin)
By concrete cooling towers
Or angular cranes
That rose above the flowers.

But he liked collecting them, decking
His small back room
With hydrangeas, roses — checking
The number of petals: cried
Watching as their colour
Leaked away, weakly died.

PURBECK 1948

Oh look, look at the vague weather on the way;
Observe the pale oblivious land;
Prince or princess, how often have I seen you fill
With flowers the bleating hours

TWO POEMS

Or stop up the sun with clouds
Dwindling to nothing in the bell-bright day.

This land is not what it seems, this land with a ghost
Up its sleeve; looking down
From the sun-wide hill, looking down at the blundering sea
Over mile upon mile of the secret smile
Of the sand we feel lost, yet befriended:
Not a sign of life, not a clue, on this agglestone coast.

I have returned twelve times to that Easter green
Amazing country with gulls assembled
Whose cries wander like sails to the skeleton-scored
Coast where the swift waves boast
And shout, and white horses canter
Back to a land that is blunt and Easter clean.

I have returned twelve times, back to that land
Where nothing belongs but the translating sky
And the gulls that twist and knit their tangled cries—
Unloved; but we stand beloved
Of chalk and hidden skulls and the fossils
That are sunk in the heart of this holy Easter land.

A Single Saint-Loup

Saint-Loup is Proust's one serious attempt at the study of sexual ambivalence. It seems to me unlikely that when he first conceived Saint-Loup and introduced him to the reader on the blazing esplanade at Balbec, he had the conscious intention of making him homosexual. Yet there is no doubt that the oddity of Saint-Loup's behaviour towards the timid and dazzled Marcel is by no means inconsistent with his behaviour in *Le Temps Retrouvé*: it is conceivable that Saint-Loup's latent obsession, hinted at in the introductory scene, became obvious to Proust himself only *after* the character had been conceived and presented. He saw in Saint-Loup potentialities that had not been realized even by himself (Proust) at the beginning; and he developed them.

It is possible to argue on certain premises that the homosexuality of Saint-Loup really does come as a surprise to the reader and is a serious artistic mistake: but to argue this simply on the grounds that Saint-Loup was for years passionately in love with the actress Rachel is to ignore the complexity of sexual behaviour in some types of men.

It is characteristic of a certain kind of homosexual love for jealousy to assume forms far more overt, far less controlled and *far more enjoyed* than is common in heterosexual relationships: and Robert's jealousy of Rachel has the histrionic stamp notable in Marcel's jealousy of Albertine, in Charlus's jealousy of Morel, but absent from Swann's jealousy of Odette. In such homosexual relationships there is often a marked tendency to 'carry on the affair in public'; to make one's friends onlookers, participants, referees. The quarrel is more enjoyable if witnessed by a third party; the reconciliation more satisfying if friends are brought in to make a party of it. It is significant that Saint-Loup likes to quarrel with Rachel and be reconciled with her under Marcel's gaze: this seems to me a genuine psychological observation on Proust's part, and I do not for a moment believe that Marcel takes part in the restaurant and theatre scenes simply because

he had to be there in order to tell the reader about them.

Proust's narrative method lands him in real difficulties only when he is forced to let Marcel 'eavesdrop' upon scenes he could never otherwise have witnessed and would, in real life, have been extremely unlikely to witness—as when he spies on the Lesbians from the hillside at Montjouvain (here even architectural and topographical possibilities are somewhat stretched for the narrator's convenience) and sees from his window in the Hôtel de Guermantes the first meeting between Charlus and Jupien: but it is not by accident, nor by the author stretching a point, that Marcel becomes involved in the affairs of Charlus and Morel. Charlus actually wants him to be present: in accordance with his peculiar sexual temperament, he needs the stimulation of an audience.

Proust, probably intending Saint-Loup to be heterosexual but having towards his creation an ambiguous personal emotion, instinctively gave him certain characteristics not uncommonly associated with certain homosexual types: and because he did this, and later, perhaps, perceived that he had done so, the *whole character* of Saint-Loup assumes an air of consistency. It is certainly true that Proust overdid the final denigration of his hero. Because love is largely unreasonable and is not to be explained by analysis of the qualities of the object, there is no reason why we should be surprised at the liaison with Morel: but it is certainly astonishing to find Saint-Loup, a highly fastidious man and still a young one (not a man who has ragged every sensation to pieces, like the senile Charlus, and is pathetically groping for new stimuli, however absurd, to comfort his old age) losing his *croix de guerre* in the messy and ridiculous squalor of Jupien's male brothel. We may have felt before this that Saint-Loup was losing moral integrity, that his splendour was rapidly fading; but we were not given to understand that he was going downhill at the rate of a played-out valetudinarian Charlus.

Proust's first conception of Saint-Loup is something like that of the Elizabethan hero, the flashing and glorious young man full of grace, beauty and valour, the morning star arising over a world made new. When Marcel first sees him, he sees him in the same romantic, historic light in which he saw Mademoiselle de Stermaria: the idea of '*la Race*' comes to his mind.

'La "Race", en adjoutant aux charmes de Mlle de Stermaria l'idée de leur cause, les rendait plus intelligibles, plus complets. Elle les faisait aussi plus désirables, annonçant qu'ils étaient peu accessibles, comme un prix élevé adjouté à la valeur d'un objet qui nous a plu. Et la tige héréditaire donnait à ce teint composé de sucres choisis la saveur d'un fruit exotique ou d'un cru célèbre.'

He is prepared by his idea of the Breton noblewoman for the advent of Saint-Loup, to whom he is ready to offer a worship based upon precisely the same accretion of fancies.

'... dans la travée centrale qui allait de la plage à la route, je vis, grand, mince, le cou dégagé, la tête haute et fièrement portée, passer un jeune homme aux yeux pénétrants et dont la peau était aussi blonde et les cheveux aussi dorés que s'ils avaient absorbé tous les rayons du soleil. Vêtu d'une étoffe souple et blanchâtre comme je n'aurais jamais cru qu'un homme eût osé en porter, et dont la minceur n'évoquait pas moins que le frais de la salle à manger la chaleur et le beau temps du dehors, il marchait vite. Ses yeux, de l'un desquels tombait à tout moment un monocle, étaient de la couleur de la mer. Chacun le regarda curieusement passer, on savait que ce jeune marquis de Saint-Loup-en-Bray était célèbre pour son élégance. Tous les journaux avaient décrit le costume dans lequel il avait récemment servi de témoin au jeune duc d'Uzès, dans un duel. Il semblait que la qualité si particulière de ses cheveux, de ses yeux, de sa peau, de sa tournure, qui l'eussent distingué au milieu d'une foule comme un filon précieux d'opale azurée et lumineuse, engagé dans une matière grossière, devait correspondre à une vie différente de celle des autres hommes.'

Marcel looks upon this young male Venus arising from the sea, heralded in his imagination by the sun-gilded curtains, the heat of the sun, the gold of the sands and the intense blue of the summer waves, with the admiration of a Shakespeare regarding a Southampton. Saint-Loup is the 'boy's hero', the dashing, the golden-haired, the 'young lion'. Marcel has heard of his reputation as a passionate womanizer, and remarks that because of his astonishing good looks some people even thought him effeminate—'but without any slur attached, for everyone knew how manly he was'.

There is quite enough in this introductory paragraph to make the events of *Le Temps Retrouvé* plausible. Saint-Loup wears a suit made of a material that makes Marcel wonder how any man could be daring enough to wear it. Like 'un filon précieux d'opale azurée et lumineuse, engagé dans une matière grossière', he is marked out from the crowd as *different from other men*. Some people think him effeminate though really 'il aimait passionément les femmes'. Yet I believe that at this stage Proust really meant Saint-Loup to be an exclusive lover of women, and that there is no 'false direction' device here. It was only later that he saw how amply, out of the recesses of his own complex nature and without meaning to do anything of the kind, he had set the scene for the future. The ambiguity is already there.

Marcel is longing to meet Saint-Loup. He watches him hungrily as he leaps into his carriage and pair 'avec l'élégance et la maîtrise qu'un grand pianiste trouve le moyen de montrer dans le trait le plus simple, où il ne semblait pas possible qu'il sût se montrer supérieur à un exécutant de deuxième ordre'. But the young man shows no desire to make his acquaintance, even though he must be perfectly aware that Marcel and his grandmother are friends of his great-aunt Villeparisis. Marcel believes that he is cold, insolent and severe; he finds it hard to credit the old lady's praise of her nephew's goodness and tenderness, and even harder to credit it when the introduction is finally made.

'Il sembla ne pas entendre qu'on lui nommait quelqu'un, aucun muscle de son visage ne bougea; ses yeux, où ne brilla pas la plus faible lueur de sympathie humaine, montrèrent seulement dans l'insensibilité, dans l'inanité du regard, une exagération à défaut de laquelle rien ne les eût différenciés de miroirs sans vie. Puis, fixant sur moi ces yeux dur comme s'il eût voulu se renseigner sur moi, avant de me rendre mon salut, par un brusque déclenchement qui sembla plutôt dû à un réflexe musculaire qu'à un acte de volonté, mettant entre lui et moi le plus grand intervalle possible, allongea le bras dans toute sa longueur, et me tendit la main, à distance.'

After this chilling and, indeed, alarming reception, Marcel is astonished to find the very next day that Saint-Loup has turned into an eager, charming, considerate friend. What, then, did it all mean? Marcel explains that Saint-Loup's method of acknowledging an introduction is simply a Guermantes trick, a social usage peculiar to his branch of the family, inculcated by his mother, and so much a part of him that he is as unconscious of it as he is of his beautiful clothes and hair. It might, however, strike a reader in a different light. This coldness is not at all an uncommon type of reaction from the invert who, tormented by the necessity of keeping the secret of himself, takes no chances from the beginning with any stranger presented to him, but at once erects the barrier he can quite easily destroy later, if it should become safe for him to do so. (I do not believe that this aspect of Saint-Loup's response was in Proust's consciousness when he described and commented upon the introduction, but I think it may have been latent in his mind. My theory may gain some support from Proust's sudden contention, later in the book, that homosexuality is an hereditary vice in the male side of the Guermantes family which only Basin, the duke, has somehow escaped; it is so odd a contention that it seems to me like an apology for a change of direction the author himself could not at this stage properly justify.)

Once Saint-Loup is 'sure' enough of Marcel to offer him friendship freely, he does so in the most wholehearted manner. The son of a father famous for the graces of an older generation, he is at the natural stage of revolt against his heredity and environment. He has, or believes he has, a deep contempt for his caste. His leanings are literary and philosophical. He studies Nietzsche and Proudhon and goes in for what Mme de Villeparisis describes as his 'déclamations socialistes'. For his father, an open-minded man who, Marcel feels, would probably have admired his son's devotion to things of the mind and spirit, Saint-Loup expresses a kind of condescending pity. 'J'ai très peu connu mon pere,' he says.

'Il paraît que c'était un homme exquis. Son désastre a été la déplorable époque où il a vécu. Etre né dans le faubourg Saint-Germain et avoir vécu à l'époque de *la Belle Hélène*, cela fait cataclysme dans une existence. Peut-être petit bourgeois fanatique du '*Ring*' eût-il donné tout autre chose. On me dit même qu'il aimait la littérature. Main on ne peut pas savoir puisque ce qu'il entendait par littérature se compose d'oeuvres périmées.'

Marcel is utterly bewildered by all this. It is those very qualities of 'la Race' that fascinated him in Saint-Loup which Saint-Loup is so eager to denigrate and abjure. Marcel does not at this time realize how deeply ingrained the force of heredity really is, and is inclined to take his friend purely at face value. He notes Saint-Loup's simplicity, his graciousness to old Madame Amédée, his charming, flushed pleasure at a compliment, his tenderness and consideration towards Marcel himself, whom he admires as a being intellectually superior, and therefore superior in all ways. It is not until the visit to Doncières, where Saint-Loup is doing his military service, that Marcel sees the first steely flash of the Guermantes spirit.

Saint-Loup's initial impudence, his intellectual radicalism, his violent plunges into friendship, his bursts of benevolence, are reactions typical of the male adolescent of his caste against family background; how much of their influence and how many of the opinions engendered by them such a man retains in later life depends upon his obstinacy of spirit: and it is through such obstinacy that family temperament develops and changes down the generations. Saint-Loup in his middle thirties becomes cautious about his Dreyfusism and his socialist leanings: he does not make a song and dance about them. When challenged by Bloch in war-time concerning his political opinions, he hastily avoids giving any by calling himself a soldier first and foremost. Nevertheless, he has not altogether turned aside from the militantly 'progressive' stand he took in his youth. He is too obstinate, too fixed a nature, too much a Guermantes, to revert

entirely to 'Guermantisme'.

At Balbec he is, despite his intellectual pretensions, innocent of human and artistic values. A portrait of Oriane by Carrière is as fine to him as anything by 'Whistler or Velasquez'. He accepts his uncle Charlus as a scandalous womanizer and regards him as something of a back number, still setting absurd value on the family heraldry, the Guermantes war-cry. It is noticeable that Saint-Loup, when discussing his uncle's social grandeur, does so with the smiling irony that conceals an ineradicable fascination.

'Il n'y a pas selon lui de titre plus ancien que celui de baron de Charlus; pour vous prouver qu'il est antérieur à celui des Montmorency, qui se disaient faussement les premiers barons de France, alors qu'ils l'étaient seulement de l'Île-de-France, où était leur fief, mon oncle vous donnera des explications pendant des heures et avec plaisir parce que, quoiqu'il soit très fin, très doué, il trouve cela un sujet de conversation tout à fait vivant, dit Saint-Loup avec un sourire. Mais comme je ne suis pas comme lui, vous n'allez pas me faire parler généalogie, je ne sais rien de plus assommant, de plus périmé, vraiment l'existence est trop courte.'

The basic instinct of Saint-Loup is, nevertheless, as 'Guermantes' in the bizarre expression of its pride, as the instinct of Charlus. When Marcel rebukes him for scolding his groom in a brutal fashion he replies, 'Why should I go out of my way to speak to him politely? Isn't he as good as I am? Isn't he just as close to me as any of my uncles and cousins? You seem to think I ought to treat him with respect as though he were an inferior!'¹ This is not how Charlus would have excused himself, but it is precisely how Charlus would have behaved and with much the same idea, but unformulated, at the back of it. Indeed, all the family resemblances in *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* are remarkably close. One recognizes a Guermantes the moment he comes into a room, even if he is only the trivial Châtellerauld. Gilberte is unmistakably the child of Swann and Odette: Marcel as unmistakably the son of his mother, the grandson of Mme. Amédée. In Albertine the chic vulgarity of her aunt, Madame Bontemps is instantly recognizable.

What Saint-Loup has at this time (Balbec, Doncières), and what Marcel is always to lack or to deny, is the true gift of friendship. Obsessed as he is by the capriciousness of his mistress Rachel (to

¹ There is a not dissimilar incident in Sinclair Lewis's *Dodsworth*, when Fran rebukes Kurt von Obersdorf for his treatment of a chauffeur—but in this case she complains of over-familiarity. Kurt's reply is that the feudal may be familiar with their servants, knowing the latter will never be impertinent.

him more precious than rubies, to Marcel merely the prostitute who could at one time be bought with a 'present') he has time to overwhelm his delicate friend with attention. He is, in fact, as attentive to him as to Rachel, for whom he carries the 'valerian drops' she may need, and to whose caravanserai of dogs, canaries and love-birds he devotes himself. The essence of Proustian courtesy, the elaboration of the process of pleasing, lies in the nature of Saint-Loup. The most striking of the 'friendship' episodes, full of *Guermites panache*, is the one concerning his circus progress round the walls of a restaurant to borrow the Prince de Foix's cloak and wrap it around the shivering Marcel (*Le Côté de Guermites* (VIII) p. 40-41. *The Guermites Way* (VI) p. 142-148) but it tells us more about Saint-Loup than that he is impulsive and kind.

For the particular service is of that brand which can only be rendered to a friend socially inferior by an aristocrat in whom the consciousness of race is branded deeply: because it symbolizes the gift of his own superiority by abrogation. If Saint-Loup had not been a nobleman and aware of it, he could not, for the sake of a charming and flamboyant compliment, have made a nobleman of Marcel. It is graceful, funny and heart-warming; but it is nevertheless a give-away, inconsistent with Saint-Loup's radical pretensions. He has bestowed a princely mantle upon Marcel precisely as M. de Charlus bestows a princely title upon Jupien's niece; both of them have displayed the enormous, loving condescension of enormous pride.

At this stage in his life, Saint-Loup is able to give himself wholly to his friendship with Marcel. It is a rather sentimental friendship on his part. He is excited when Marcel suggests that they shall address each other as 'tu'. At Doncières, among his brother conscripts, he will egg his friend on to tell some story or other, protesting that he has never heard it before though in fact he knows it by heart, simply in order to exhibit Marcel publicly in the most witty and charming light. But he is *Guermites* enough to forget friendship when called upon to do things distasteful to him: it is inconvenient for him, when driving with another friend at Doncières, to acknowledge Marcel's greeting; so he offers the salute he might give to a mere acquaintance, stiff, unsmiling, impersonal. Marcel charitably attributes this to short-sightedness, and is later astonished to hear that Saint-Loup had in fact recognized him, but had decided to pretend otherwise. Marcel notes his capacity for well-bred dissimulations, to be performed at a moment's notice, and is disturbed.

Again, because it does not suit him, does not fit in with his plans, Saint-Loup shies away from giving Marcel the desire of his heart: an introduction to his aunt Oriane. He will offer him anything he wants

except the one thing he wants most; and it is characteristic of Proust's obsessive suspiciousness that he believes this is not merely an idiosyncratic trait in certain temperaments, but a trait inherent in the nature of 'friendship' itself.

When Saint-Loup takes Marcel to the restaurant to lunch with Rachel, he displays the same sort of histrionic rage and tenderness towards his mistress, the same enjoyment of an onlooker's presence, as Charlus is later to display in his relations with Morel. He has, in fact, an hysterical streak—suggested here, and strongly marked years later, when he is the faithless husband of Gilberte.

'Ah! vois—tu, me disait Saint-Loup—avec un accent volontairement tendre qui contrastait tant avec sa tendresse spontanée d'autrefois, avec une voix d'alcoolique et des modulations d'acteur—Gilberte heureuse, il n'y a rien que je ne donnerais pour cela. Ella a tant fait pour moi. Tu ne peux pas savoir.'

Marcel observes that homosexual husbands generally make their wives happy unless, wanting others to believe they are woman-lovers, they run after endless mistresses without having any pleasure from them, and thereby make their wives extremely miserable. This is what Saint-Loup does, and when he has made Gilberte wretched by his own peculiar kind of double-crossing, he comes to her room, talks about his approaching death, sobs bitterly and sometimes hurls himself about on the floor as though he is ill.

It is that strong masochistic strain in Saint-Loup, manifest in his relations with the callous Rachel and later with his wife, which brings some faint plausibility to his final entry into Jupien's house: but I believe this strain was noted by Proust and used as a link only after he had unconsciously written it into Saint-Loup and had had time to study what he had set down. This final view of the living hero is the most startling of Proust's nervous exaggerations. Time and time again his obsessions lead him to overstep the mark, but never so haplessly as upon this occasion. I see no reason to doubt, as some critics have done, that Saint-Loup would never have become homosexual at all; the indications are there from the beginning: but I have to admit that his final degradation seems to me wholly arbitrary and absurd.

Apart from this, he may be regarded as one of the most perfectly integrated and logically developed characters in the entire work, a mass of contradictions brought mysteriously into complete psychological affirmation.

He is charming, tender, hypersensitive; and quite heartless when it suits him to be so. He is arrogant, impudent, and at the same time eager to submit the whole of his being to anyone (Rachel, Marcel,

Morel, Gilberte) whom he hopefully considers capable of playing the master, whether intellectually or sexually. He is adroit, and at the same time gullible—believes his uncle Charlus is a womanizer bordering upon satyriasis, believes his aunt Oriane is 'almost a Dreyfusard', believes Hugo superior to Racine (and, moreover, that anyone with taste is aware of this fact), believes that Marcel believes him unfaithful to Gilberte with another woman whereas, as Marcel is perfectly well aware, the attraction is Morel. In youth, he is proud to display his radical opinions; *au fond* he is solidly Faubourg Saint-Germain. He is calm and tolerant, an excellent soldier and a loyal friend; he is also neurotic and hysterical. (He may watch his own hysteria with a certain detachment and use it when it pays; but the hysteric is in fact a most sedulous watcher of himself.) He is superbly open: and he is secret. It is the secret of the heart and the heart's fear of it, which prompts his icy response to Marcel's first greeting, the same secret that makes him salute Marcel from the carriage as though he were the most casual of acquaintances, the same secret that drives him to fury when Rachel flirts with the effeminate dancer at the theatre, the same secret that makes him withhold from his adoring mother the affection she pathetically craves. 'The Profanation of the Mother' (Proust's thesis of the dishonour that the son, by the sin of inversion, lays upon the parent)¹ does not lie so far behind Saint-Loup's irritation at his mother's tenderness, though Marcel himself implies that it is merely revenge for Madame de Marsantes' hostility towards Rachel.

Indeed, this may have been Saint-Loup's explanation to himself of his own behaviour; I think it unlikely that he realized his homosexuality at all until the liaison with Rachel was done with. From such internal evidence as there is, this must have terminated some time between 1897 and 1900. To fit any plausible chronology, Saint-Loup must have married Gilberte about 1903, by which time his real tastes were defined. What is missing, therefore, is any concrete link between Rachel's Saint-Loup and Morel's. I find it as hard to credit the revelations of the waiter Aimé with regard to Saint-Loup and the lift-boy as I find them hard to credit, *in toto*, with regard to Albertine. Marcel himself, it must be remembered, has his doubts of Aimé's probity.

Externally Saint-Loup is all radiance, all beauty; a Hellenic idealization of the glory of young manhood, gifted with beauty, intellect, charm, health and money.

¹ The repulsive theory of M. Charles Briand in *Le Secret de Marcel Proust* is unacceptable to me, though the book contains much that is enlightening.

As I wrote elsewhere of the hero of a contemporary novel:

'He . . . is as richly gifted as a T. E. Lawrence or a Saint-Loup, and like them, harbours in his nature the seed of his own destruction. As the Raleighs and Sidneys blazed like meteors across the Elizabethan sky, so this young man seems destined to glorify his own age. He is handsome and well-off . . . he is capable of the most profound and delicate friendship and of the wildest, most provocative exploit: he is witty, charming, an accomplished lover of women. He is like the hero of legend, endowed by seven godmothers with all the attributes which make it seem not improbable that man is made indeed in God's image. Yet he is a damned soul, the door in the darkness open to receive him even as the door of Jupien's house stood open to Saint-Loup from the day of his birth.'

I am prepared now to qualify that final sentence; it seems to me that though the door of Jupien's house did indeed stand open to Saint-Loup from the beginning, Proust pushed him across the threshold long before his time.

The contention of Professor F. C. Green that Hyperion becomes a satyr all at once¹, that we have had no intimation that such a change might come about (except through the overheard conversation of Saint-Loup and a flunkey, which merely reveals the former's capacity for idle malice), seems to me hard to maintain in the light of closer study. Proust loved Saint-Loup and destroyed him as he would have wished to destroy the secret within himself; but as he wrote of him *he grew him* (or, more fancifully perhaps, and at the same time more precisely) he allowed Saint-Loup *to write himself*.

It is at the point where the planchette board fails and the author takes over that the disaster occurs. There is only one vital flaw in this superb study of a radiant character fading and falling to decay, and it occurs at the moment when Marcel hears Maurice and his friends in the ante-room of Jupien's house excitedly discussing the finding of the *croix de guerre*, for which Saint-Loup is to inquire so anxiously of Françoise that evening.

¹ *The Mind of Proust*, F. C. Green. Cambridge University Press, 1949. The most thorough work on the text that has appeared in English.

Ivy Compton-Burnett



Miss Compton-Burnett's isolation from contemporary novelists is surely a most exact measure of the failure of the modern English novel. This failure is now a very worn-out critical theme. It threatens to become the most tedious of King Charles's heads and it should undoubtedly be avoided by any critic who does not wish to become as boring as Mr Dick. It inevitably arises, however, in any estimation of Miss Compton-Burnett's work.

The debate on the English novel's decline now runs like clockwork. We are cut off from our traditional roots, says the critic, the soil from which our greatness sprang has been weakened by artificial experiments. Without experiment, comes the reply, there can be no new growth, the soil will be clogged and choked with weeds. Surely, says the inevitable third and sensible critic, we may make use of all that experiment has taught us, may indeed experiment ourselves, without losing contact with our good old English tradition, the true husbandry needs old and new alike. The simile, though undistinguished, is, I think, justly used, for the debate on the decline of the novel has the same familiarity, the same echo of stale wireless discussions as the debate on the use of artificial manures. Yet, if the sensible third voice is right and I think we must concede it to be so, Miss Compton-Burnett seems alone in following its call. Her novels are deeply entrenched in the great tradition of the English novel, or rather, in the great traditions, for this much vaunted single tradition is an invention of obtuse and indiscriminating traditionalists. Miss Compton-Burnett is also a great experimentalist: she has rigorously adapted form and language to accord with her aims, which is surely the only serious experiment to be considered. And yet she stands so alone in a wilderness of dreary imitated dead experiment and dismal imitated dead tradition. The unique vigour, the formidable strength of her books does not come only from her ethic, her healthy acceptance of life, but is a direct expression of her creative vitality. Her

living art which should be an oak in a contemporary forest, stands out in its isolation, almost theatrically monolithic, like Stonehenge on Salisbury Plain.

To praise so highly is not indeed to say that the greatness of her achievement can be easily estimated, nor even that it can be absolutely asserted. She inherits and uses so many of the themes and manners of the nineteenth-century golden age of the novel. She has explored and made her own the aesthetic ethic, the touchstone of goodness in taste, decorum and sincerity which was once for all stated by Jane Austen and then miraculously expanded by James and not inconsiderably ornamented by Virginia Woolf and Forster. She can make humours into personalities compelling our childish horror, demanding our sympathy by their own childish pathos. Here she moves easily in the world not only of Sir Walter Eliot and Lady Catherine de Burgh, but of Mr Pecksniff and Mr Dorrit, of the Duc de Guermantes and the Baron de Charlus. She explores the stuff of personality, its fictions and its onion peelings of reality; and like the great nineteenth-century novelists, she exploits hypocrisy and false sincerity in humanity in order to discuss truth. These connections with the great novelists have, I think, been remarked upon by other critics. What, so far as I know, has not been noted is her likeness to a more improbable nineteenth-century writer—Oscar Wilde. There is, nevertheless, something strangely akin in their combination of the language and wit of high comedy with the plots of melodrama. She does not, of course, lapse so easily into the language of melodrama as Wilde, but there are purple passages in her work which are by no means intended ironically. Finally, it seems to me, that in the total statement of her novels, in what is insufficiently but conveniently described as her 'acceptance', she develops straight from the great agnostic artists of the last century. I use the word 'artists' here to denote the spiritual battle fought out in a Christian society. It seems customary to call her ethic pagan, and Mr Liddell¹, her latest critic and great admirer, tries to define her novels in the terms of Greek tragedy. The attempt seems to me too grandiose and too remote, by asserting the wrong 'too much' about her work he ends by making too little of it. To use the word 'pagan' about any modern person is at best a vague term of differentiation, allowable perhaps to Christians confused by varieties of unbelief; to use it as a term of praise is unhistorical and misleading. It does not help in understanding Housman or Hardy, it helps even less in understanding Miss Compton-Burnett. The Christian surrounding of her world is more decayed,

¹ *The Novels of I. Compton-Burnett* by Robert Liddell. (Gollancz. 10s. 6d.)

more perfunctory than that of George Eliot, and her answer is at once less consciously and culturally agnostic than George Eliot's, and also less unconsciously Christian than the burden of Evangelical duty that George Eliot carried. Nevertheless the Christian ruins are the backcloth of her family dramas—Establishment, orders of society, feeble ends of Christian ethics. When she portrays belief she does so with the same understanding and dignified rejection as George Eliot. For all her craggy isolation, for all the icy winds that seem at times to howl through her dialogue, there is a warmth, a sense of comedy at its highest level remaining at the end of many of her novels that makes her acceptant view of life seem strangely like the human realism of Tolstoy's best novels.

I have purposely allowed myself to bandy great names so freely, for it is only so, I think, that we can begin to see the difficulties of estimating Miss Compton-Burnett's place as a novelist. Her intention is very high, her handling of the dialogue medium she has chosen is masterly, her range is only in a rather superficial sense narrow, yet there are few, I think, who could happily feel that her total work, or indeed any of her individual novels, is great in the sense that we apply this word to Jane Austen, Dickens, George Eliot, Tolstoy or Proust. In some degree this is simply the difficulty of applying to a contemporary author judgement which is made up of qualities observed in novelists of the past. This difficulty, however, should not be very serious with Miss Compton-Burnett, whose work as we have seen bears such a close relationship to those very novelists. In some degree we may be unwilling to apply the word 'great' to a novelist whose works are unlikely ever to be popular as were those of Dickens or George Eliot. That there is some element of this in our difficulty seems likely when we compare her to Henry James—the comparison seems at once more allowable than any of the others we have made. Nevertheless I doubt if we will feel satisfied to place them on the same level. Yet if we do admit this distrust of an author with a limited appeal to be more than a sentimentalism, we shall have to explain what element is lacking in an unpopular author that contributes to 'greatness'. We cannot make the naïve charge of limited range of observation or of social scene, for we should have to reject our corner-stone, Jane Austen. Some critics, I suppose, would claim that Miss Compton-Burnett has lived cut off from her time; not only in the narrow sense that she does not write of contemporary life or that her world is a dead social unit—the late Victorian family—but on a deeper spiritual level. She has not been touched, they would suggest, by the fresh vision of original sin that has come to us in the last forty years. It is surely exactly this modernity of vision, how-

ever, which separates her agnosticism from that of George Eliot, as it does Mr T. S. Eliot's Christianity from Victorian Christianity. Finally, there are those who would refuse her greatness simply because she was working in the medium of the novel. The novel is a dead art, they would assert, we cannot therefore expect any more great novelists. Most of such critics, however, would admit that the novel is only dead if we are speaking of its traditional form, its future lies in new developments which will free the imagination. It can hardly be on this ground then that Miss Compton-Burnett can be denied greatness, for no one has rejected the old forms or evolved a new one more satisfactorily.

The truth, I believe, does not lie in any of these usual generalizations about content or form. Miss Compton-Burnett is unique not only in her difference from contemporary novelists and her superiority to them, but unique among novelists generally. And it is the peculiar quality of her remarkable talent that she immediately invites comparison with the great and yet cannot attain that status. From *Pastors and Masters* onwards—I see no reason to discuss *Dolores* since she does not do so herself—she consciously asserts her concern with the highest themes of the novel and demonstrates her special approach to them. It is a consciousness of importance, a direct statement of intention that allows for a thousand nuances, a host of subtleties, but allows of no serious development. Development comes not from conscious overtones, but from unconscious themes and conflicts and symbols. With *Pastors and Masters*, with Henry Bentley and the Merrys, she emerged full grown before a world that had no practice in recognizing such a phenomenon. That her reputation has grown as more and more discerning critics have discovered her adult powers is not surprising, nor that those who have recognized her should proselytize her work and judge their friends by their reception of it. An adult writer of high seriousness is not so common a phenomenon that we can make her less than a touchstone of taste. There have, of course, been changes in her work; she has developed her children, she has developed her servants, in her latest novel, *Mother and Son*, she develops a cat, she allows herself an occasional comment now amid the flow of brilliant dialogue and the odd truncated personal descriptions, her style, though still curiously jerky in places, moves more easily. But these are not developments of the inner core of her writing; she need never have introduced what Mr Liddell calls her choruses of children and servants, she need never have smoothed out the awkwardnesses of her sentences, and she could still have ranked with the greatest. As it is, from the very first, we have had enough and more than enough to

satisfy us, novels being as they are today. Nevertheless we have not had that inner development, that gradual unconscious change that we find between *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Our Mutual Friend*, or between *Scenes of Clerical Life* and *Middlemarch*, which we rightly associate with great novelists. Like other changes, these are not necessarily to be called progress; *The Ambassadors* is not necessarily better than *Portrait of a Lady* nor *Mansfield Park* than *Pride and Prejudice*. If it is for progress that we ask, it may well be said that *More Men than Women* is better than *Pastors and Masters*, and *A Family and a Fortune* or *A House and Its Head* better still. Indeed, in point of omission of distracting elements and of formal arrangement, her latest novel *Mother and Son* excels all the others. Fundamentally, however, her novels remain the same: she presents us with a whole view of life and conveys that whole view in a subtle and convincing way, but she does not tell us more of it or show it to us from another side, or make us feel or think about it more deeply than she did from the very start. It is thus, I think, that her work misses greatness, but misses it probably so narrowly that we are constantly urged to set her novels beside the masterpieces of the past.

This sameness of statement, complete yet never new, is surely the reason why many critics of discernment fail to appreciate her work. There are many readers, of course, who lack either wit or intellectual discipline to make contact with her novels. There are, however, people of wit and intelligence who find the dish monotonous, or others again like Miss Hansford Johnson who appreciate her work but can yet, as Mr Liddell is at pains to point out, lose their way in the labyrinth of her plots. This, I believe, is because of this underlying sameness, for there is certainly no other monotony. Each book contains characters so different, so completely lifelike that any attempt, like Mr Liddell's, to categorize them into tyrants or victims tells us nothing of any importance about them. Matty Seaton, cruel, brutal, that occasional real life person who is larger than life, clever and understanding, refuses to be categorized as a tyrant, and she certainly has nothing to do with the other tyrants, Harriet Haslam or Sophia Stace or Miranda Hume or Duncan Edgeworth or Sir Jesse Sullivan. It is useless for the critic to try his usual trick of categorizing the events or the characters, for life is not susceptible to moral category, has no finality of event except death and that, as Miss Compton-Burnett never ceases to tell us, is only final to those who die and even then in quite different ways. There are, of course, goats and sheep, and in accordance with the great tradition of Miss Austen they are betrayed by nuances alone, but these nuances are not such constant tests in Miss Compton-Burnett's world as in Jane Austen's,

not even so constant as they are in Forster's or Virginia Woolf's. There are the great 'humorous' figures like Sophia or Josephine or Matty or Roseberry Hume, figures with the outlines of Dickens's world, but though we know them to be somewhere on the wrong side of the fence, we must never build our fences too exactly. In Roseberry, the son of her new novel, *Mother and Son*, a certain sort of moralizing, humourless, playful, heightened speech speaks against him or at the most calls for our pity, yet in Justine Gaveston we can see that the same tone speaks for 'goodness', and in Luce Sullivan for something in between. It is this ambiguity of personal values, I think, that makes the nature of her plots so essential to her novels. Much objection has been made to what is called their 'melodrama'—incest, illegitimacy, occasional murder. They are, of course, familiar mechanisms of novel narrative and if Miss Compton-Burnett used them purely formally as mechanical devices I do not think it would be objectionable. She has, however, in her radio discussion with Miss Jourdain, stated that she believes them to be real ingredients of a great deal of family life—sometimes as skeletons revealed, sometimes as skeletons for ever hidden. This view I entirely accept. It has been my experience that most middle class families have some 'secret' of this kind in their midst. On grounds of realism also, then, they do not seem to me objectionable. If, however, we examine the nature of this 'melodrama' more closely we will find surely that it is an integral element in the whole ambiguity which is at the centre of her view of human values. The revelation of incest and of illegitimacy must mean that the members of a family have to see themselves anew as different people in exactly the most important sense that exists in the family unit—they are no longer sons and daughters, or they are not only sons and daughters of their parents but brothers and sisters as well. And if, as so often happens, they later find that the revelation was untrue, they must once again revert to their former view of their personalities, but the former view can never be what it was before because they have learned in between to see the whole of their world from a different angle. It is, of course, the common theme of Shakespearean comedy. Its final effect is to question at its roots the whole conception of 'personality', to consider it only as relative. And this, of course, is the essential of Miss Compton-Burnett's attitude. What, in fact, are we to make of personality or event at all, when illegitimacy so often proves us to be other than we thought, or when false report has made us digest a cataclysm that never occurred? Perhaps, we are led to conclude that relationship, the fundamental family relationship which rules her books, does not matter at all, when Christian and

Sophia are sister and brother as well as husband and wife, or seem to be; or when Edmund Lovat seems to have married his daughter and has not; but who could say that it did not matter to Roseberry that Miranda was his mother even if Julius was not his father. Sometimes relationship is vital and sometimes it is not, is the answer. And so it is with everything else, with death, with malice, with arrogance, with charity, with patronage, with plain speaking, with lying, they may be good or they may not, they may be final or they may be transient. Nothing can be judged except in its context, and then only with reservation. In *Mother and Son*, for example, Miranda praises her son in these words, 'He would not do little wrong things behind my back; he would not do them any more than the great ones; and that is a rare thing'. Yet in the same book, Hester Wolsey does great wrong and her friend Emma Greatheart says, 'I will think the one thing, that she has known the depths, and that I have seen her knowing them. It is a good thing experience is ennobling. I believe she is becoming a little ennobled.' If we cannot judge of the good and the bad, we cannot also judge of the important and the unimportant. We can know, perhaps, that Dulcia Bode and Faith Crammer are as unimportant as they are comic, but this is exceptional levity on the author's part. Who can say whether Roseberry who looms so large is more important, even as a literary character, than his supposed father Julius, or Matty Seaton than her sister Blanche? We might as well try to judge between Vronsky and Anna, Karenin or Levin. The manner in which Miss Compton-Burnett so wonderfully suggests real life is, in fact, so similar to that of Tolstoy—Levin's sudden perception of religious truth which seems momentarily so decisive and yet is the next moment gone, the falsity of the apparently basic moments in Anna's life with Vronsky—change and false change, climaxes that are transient, chance remarks that are final, trivialities that take up more attention and energy than death or disaster. It is not that Miss Compton-Burnett is less plumb at the centre of life than her great predecessor, but only that Tolstoy gives us aspects of this centre from a hundred different, revolving mirrors that almost bewilder us by their changing reflections, while she has only one mirror, clear and full, but unchanging. It is, nevertheless, a mirror to be deeply grateful for.

Book Reviews

THE MINT by 352087 A/C Ross (T. E. Lawrence). (*Jonathan Cape*. 17s. 6d.)

'*The Mint* mustn't be published till after 1950. . . . The new point of view, to which you (surprisingly . . . for I did not know there was one) allude, will be old, by then.' So Lawrence wrote to E. M. Forster in 1928; but recent reviews, in paraphrasing this prophecy, have been scarcely fair to a pioneer work whose literary influence, and impact upon the public, would have been overwhelming had it been allowed to appear sixteen years ago. Lawrence's experience was indeed 'open to anyone who enlists'; and he cannot be blamed for the fact that, a war having intervened, other writers, scribbling hastily their impressions of a new environment under Service conditions, should have evolved, for the same reasons as himself, a similar 'emotional and intellectual shorthand' of style.

Another point which must be emphasized, for the benefit of readers acquainted only, so far, with the pre-publication extracts serialized in a Sunday newspaper, is that (owing, doubtless, to shortage of space) these were so telescoped as to give an entirely wrong impression of the author's reaction to the life he had voluntarily embraced, which in the serial version appears to have been mainly one of rancorous and even contemptible self-pity. This is by no means the cumulative effect conveyed by the book itself. It is true that Lawrence's revulsion against the romantic popular legend and his sudden plunge into anonymous servitude 'amongst crude men' had in themselves an element of the self-dramatization which he sincerely loathed; true also that, in a desperate attempt to deny his reputation for courage, he perhaps exaggerates the extent of his own anxieties when describing, for instance, the fear—akin to that of a boy on his first day at school—that any recruit gifted with imagination must have shared, to some degree, on being confronted initially

with the alien atmosphere of the barrack room (though a later literary generation may have been more successful — and less honest — in concealing it: at any rate, when reporting such experiences in print).

Yet Lawrence, who was no stranger to a corporate existence, who had written in *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*: 'We had no shut places to be alone in, no thick clothes to hide our nature. Man in all things lived candidly with man', really did shrink, with a sort of *pudeur*, from the close contacts and lack of privacy imposed by his new surroundings; in the desert he had drunk brackish, 'just possible', water from a well and kneeled with the Arabs round the communal dish, scooping from it greasy lumps of meat and liver, and kneading them 'with the right hand which alone was honourable'; he had, though affected with dysentery and fever at the time, himself executed a murderous follower (taking three bullets to do it); he'd picked his way over putrid corpses gnawed by rats and endured, from the henchmen of a sadistic homosexual Turkish Bey, a beating-up unequalled in even the toughest transatlantic thriller; yet the stench of pig-swill and maggoty carcasses of meat which he was forced to handle in the RAF camp nauseated him; he was repelled by the ribaldry, the noisy good-fellowship and strident sexual boasts of his companions in the squad; and, because of his previous physical ordeals, the senseless drudgery of fatigues and, later, the equally idiotic routine of square-bashing brought him almost to the point of collapse: while PT, owing to a broken rib sustained in an air-crash, remained the most dreaded daily period of all.

None the less, he was no snob and, though restrained by the aloofness of his nature from forming any real friendships among the men, he very soon overcame any aversion he may have felt at their crudities; we find him, within the space of 26 pages, able not only to relish a swearing-match between two 'champion obscenists', but to share in the enjoyment of 'our surest humour': the inimitable performances of Sailor, a dauntless spirit whose ability to break wind at will made 'the very sergeants shake with laughter'. Every ex-Serviceman will recognize the truth of the picture he draws at this point: the hubbub rising to a crescendo in the hut as the time for Last Post approaches; the monotonous scraping rhythm of boot-brushes; the beery monologue going on regardless above a chorus of song 'supported with mess-tin lids and banged boxes' (this latter supplemented, in our own time, by the blaring radio); the 'intermittent whisper' in the darkness after lights out; the cigarette doused by the taciturn, sympathetic corporal; the 'piano-jangling of wire beds'; the stertorous breathing; the groans; the girls' names and sudden protests shouted in sleep, while the yellow rays shine in through the window-

panes from the haunted moonscape outside. After the first fourteen days, Lawrence had adjusted himself finally; and his complaints thereafter were directed at their legitimate objective: the abuses to which he and his comrades were needlessly subjected by the authorities. Routine itself at the Uxbridge Depot was no more stupidly 'regimental' than at most ITCs during the recent war; but discipline was tyrannically enforced in a way that would not be tolerated, nowadays, outside a Detention Barrack: recruits' hair was 'clipped to the blood'; they were made to double, after tea, in full pack around the square, sworn-at freely and foully by NCOs who were in turn black-guarded by their superiors in full hearing of their squads; sergeants derived sexual excitement from the sight of the exhaustion they had induced in their men; venal corporals instituted a system of blackmail by which extra parades might be avoided at a price: one (trading on his 1914 war VC) ordered a man to run up and down while crippled by a nail in his boot, another robbed the body of a recruit who'd committed suicide; PT, usually conducted under the basilisk eye of the Commandant (a sadistic cripple so hated that an orderly, on hearing that he was dining in Mess, spat into the soup), eventually became a war of nerves between passively rebellious swaddies and bullying gym instructors. Yet, despite all this, high spirits and savage horseplay, of a sort which few Service-chroniclers since Lawrence's day will have encountered, often reigned in the barrack-hut. There were pillow fights and mock courts-martial; and apparently even Lawrence got drawn-in: having resisted Dickson's attempts to strangle him, he had his private parts 'kneaded' by his opponent, and was saved only by the intervention of Taffy Jenkins, the squad drill-sergeant, whose portrait is the best in the book.

Burly, florid and bibulous, with his ferocious mock-threats concealing a generously kind nature, both Taffy and his locutions are a sheer joy ('Per ardua ad asbestos. What does that mean? All together after me "— you Jack, I'm fireproof"'.') With his advent, the troubles of Lawrence's 'flight', though not over, were much ameliorated; there was still Stiffy, the drill-crazed adjutant, to be faced daily on the square, but even this holy terror proved in the end to be human: though Lawrence seems oddly to have misunderstood the pathos of the scene in the lecture-hall, when Stiffy stoops 'to defend his square-folly of violence and cursing, begging fellows not to be thin-skinned and resent what was intended for their good'.

Although the author prided himself on the care with which he had arranged the various sections, they appear, actually, to have been shuffled about haphazard: those dealing with the Commanding Officer and Stiffy, for example, should have been placed much earlier

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in their respective sequences. Construction was not Lawrence's strong point; and the third part, describing his happiness when transferred three years later (after an even unhappier interlude in the Tank Corps) to the RAF Cadet College at Cranwell, and added-on to 'redress the uniform darkness of the Depot picture', bears traces of having been written-up and lacks the force of the directly-observed scenes: even though it includes a hilarious kit-laden rail journey, a curiously lyrical account of a young airman's first sex-affair, and a grim Freudian nightmare narrated by a police corporal. In the recital of these two latter incidents, Lawrence appears successfully to have conquered his fear of squalid realism, even infusing them with a sort of poetry; but the triumph of the book is nevertheless centred in the earlier sections and his accurate rendering of Service atmosphere and speech, whose authentic accents he must have been one of the very first to catch.

Although, as a prose work, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* scarcely deserved the extravagant tributes it received on publication, Lawrence's sharp eye for descriptive detail and gift for selecting the apt simile often puts the contemporary 'poetical' travel-book to shame, as two short quotations will show:

'They drank hurriedly . . . throwing out the last dregs on the ground, where the drops ran apart like quicksilver upon the dusty surface till they were clotted and sank in speckled shot-holes over its drifted greyness,' or: 'interminable lava (like scrambled egg gone iron-blue and very wrong), sharp as insect-bites underfoot.'

It is these qualities which are mainly demonstrated in the best parts of *The Mint*, and the versatility which allowed him to adopt a new style in keeping with this vastly different subject reveals him to have been a real writer: although the dichotomy of his nature, together with his prejudice against publication and mania for revision, would perhaps have prevented him from ever becoming a great one, had he lived to write another book.

The excision of certain words and passages from the text of the 'unrestricted' edition seems to have been effected arbitrarily: one reads of 'gnat's —' when the expression 'Pissquick' is allowed to stand; and a chapter entitled '— Cart' is followed by the same phrase, unexpurgated, in the first paragraphs of the next, while a forthright mention of 'shithouses' occurs thirty pages previously. It is a sad reflection on the increasing puritanism of our New Elizabethan age to see the 'offending' words printed, in full, in an American pocket-book magazine with a circulation infinitely larger than *The Mint* is likely to enjoy.

J. MACLAREN-ROSS

BOOK REVIEWS

HOMER'S DAUGHTER by Robert Graves. (Cassell. 10s. 6d.)

COUNT BELISARIUS by Robert Graves. (Penguin Books. 3s. 6d.)

Mr Graves's historical fiction is always finely written and entertaining. It is often accurate, and very often persuasive. Among his very best works in this field is, I think, *Count Belisarius*, now reprinted in the Penguins. It can, no doubt, be criticized by scholars in points of detail, as can the novels of Sir Walter Scott; yet accuracy in detail, though important, is not one of the most important qualities for a successful work of historical fiction. Most important of all is that the work should be alive, that the characters and the period in which they once existed should seem to us, however unfamiliar, real, so that, when we lay the book down, we can imagine that this was a period in which we might have lived, these were people whom we might have known. In order to produce this effect of reality the author is not only entitled, but bound to take certain liberties and to exercise great ingenuity. For the historical documents themselves cannot, in the nature of things, be adequate for the purpose of the historical novelist, whose business it is not to record, but to recreate. This is, of course, also a function of the historian, when he is not merely an annalist; but we still expect from the historian a greater rigidity and, as it were, fairer play. He must not attempt to deceive us in any way at all. If he makes a conjecture, he must acknowledge that he is doing so. If, for example, he describes the weather on a certain day, we have a right to demand that he only does so because he has reliable information that on this particular day the weather was, in fact, just as he describes it. Nor, of course, must he introduce into his history characters who never existed in flesh and blood.

The historical novelist, on the other hand, is entitled to produce characters out of his sleeve and to pretend to know about the weather. Yet still we demand from him a certain overriding accuracy, though it is a kind of accuracy which is very difficult to define. On the whole, the problems concerned with weather, furniture, costume and all outer apparatus are relatively simple. One is most offended by those writers who load their work with too much of these properties so that their pages resemble museum catalogues; for, in the end, it is the people who matter. An accurate description of a trireme, for instance, is only justified in an historical novel if it helps us to understand the people who sailed in the vessel.

Much more difficult are the problems which confront the author when he comes to create or conjecture, as he must, the thoughts, feelings and words of imaginary, and in particular, real characters. Here a demand for perfect accuracy is impossible. We simply do not

know what Napoleon or Belisarius felt or said on numbers of important and unimportant occasions. Yet in a novel they must feel or say something, and in a novel which is based on history their feelings and sayings must be, from both a human and historical point of view, at least credible. Perhaps this is as far as one can go in one's demand for accuracy and one must approve all authors who possess sufficient skill to make their inventions credible. Such an author, certainly is Mr Graves. He recreates both Rome and Byzantium with a delightful ease. His characters, real or imaginary, speak and act as though they were alive today, so that one believes in them without any effort whatever. He indeed tempts one to declare that, in this form of art, credibility, vigour and vividness are everything. Nevertheless, important as they are, they are not everything. What seems credible must also be credible, unless historical fiction is to be regarded as a form of conjuring. Much has to be invented, but no excellence in invention can justify a disregard for facts or a perversity in their interpretation. And in most cases Mr Graves shows a great respect for facts. Not always, however. It would seem, for instance, that for the purposes of his story, he could not resist incorporating an account of the blinding of the aged Belisarius by an ungrateful emperor. That the emperor was ungrateful is certain; but that Belisarius was blinded is, to say the least, most uncertain. Mr Graves's account of the blinding is, of course, most moving and effective, but is still, I think, not to be justified.

Still less to be justified is the theory which lies behind his latest work, *Homer's Daughter*; and here he does himself a disservice in insisting on dressing up in the sober robes of history what is really only an engaging fantasy. We are told that he has found the evidence for a female authorship of the *Odyssey* 'irrefutable'. It may be; but it is still extremely improbable. It is stated that the *Odyssey* is 'a poem about and for women'. Yet even if this were so (and I do not think it is), it does not follow that it was composed by a woman. *Anna Karenina*, for instance, might be said to be 'about and for women'; yet the sex of Tolstoy is not in dispute. Nevertheless, in reviving Butler's theory that the *Odyssey* was written by Nausicaa, Mr Graves has found a good opportunity for imagining how the poem might, under very unlikely circumstances, have come into existence. It is an ingenious and agreeable work. Nausicaa has lost the strange charm which she has in Homer, but has gained a different kind of charm. She is shrewd, practical and sensitive, rather like an excellent head girl. There is something of the excitement of a detective story in the accounts of how events in her life and various legends come together so as to form the plot of the *Odyssey*. Yet in giving

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these accounts Mr Graves has perforce to retell certain portions of the *Odyssey* itself, or rather make Nausicaa tell them. They are told well enough, in a matter of fact way, but not half as well as they were told by Homer (or by Nausicaa in later years). Still, if one can forget this (which is not easy) one will find much else in the book to admire—a clean, rapid style which only breaks down in the scene of the killing of the suitors (incidentally one of the scenes which seem certainly to have been written about and for men), many vivid and credible pictures of Greek life in Sicily about the year 750 BC, great ingenuity and considerable charm. In fact, though the book may be said on the whole to be about and for women, it shows every trace of having been written, as advertised, by Mr Graves himself.

REX WARNER

FLAMINGO FEATHER by Laurens van der Post. (*Hogarth Press*. 12s. 6d.)

Laurens van der Post has now published five books, of which four are novels, and *Flamingo Feather* is both the longest and most ambitious. It has been widely praised by reviewers of diverse tastes, but it seems to me to fail in what I take to be its object. The fact is Mr van der Post has things to say which are of great importance, but I am sure that he is wasting his very considerable talent in trying to expound his views in fictional form. He has exceptional gifts but they are not those of a novelist.

Whether we face it or not (and most people, frustrated, take the latter course) the future of Africa is a problem of world importance. Most of us do not even begin to understand the nature of the difficulties, but it is in this particular field that Mr van der Post has, I believe, a unique contribution to make. He was born and brought up in Africa, speaks several native languages with complete fluency, and his mother-tongue is, surprisingly, not English but Afrikaans. He might, although it is unlikely, have become an exceptionally persuasive exponent of the Afrikaner point of view, were it not for his attachment to the philosophical ideas of Jung, which are apparent in nearly everything he writes. This almost religious belief in the essential goodness of man is particularly evident in the long short-story, *A Bar of Shadow*, in which the author has described, in fictional form, his own war-time experiences as a prisoner of the Japanese. He was, I believe, treated with great harshness, and many people were understandably repelled by what appeared to be a too forgiving attitude towards his goalers. His philosophical outlook is both his strength and his weakness; for while it is obviously good to

believe in the oneness of man, it is not easy to prevent this faith from degenerating into a woolly sentimentality.

It would be possible to regard *Flamingo Feather* simply as an exciting adventure story in the tradition of Rider Haggard and John Buchan, which is what most reviewers have done, and leave it at that. The suspense is well contrived, but the plot, when one comes to reflect upon it, is naïve and altogether too improbable. Briefly, this is a story of two white hunters who suspect that something evil is being prepared on a vast scale in Africa. Neither has the slightest idea what it is, but both possess unusual knowledge of the country and its people, and by means of intuitive reasoning they discover and finally frustrate a gigantic plan to eliminate European government of the continent. It seems that the author, with the Kikuyu uprising in mind, is trying to warn us what might well happen all over Africa if we do not immediately apply ourselves to putting our African house in order. The trouble is that it is almost impossible to believe in the characters. Pierre, the hero-in-chief, is a man of incredible saintliness, a sort of idealized Boy Scout, and as we follow his adventures we positively yearn to be told that he has taken to drink, committed adultery, or at least displays some minor human failing. And it is unfortunate that the book is written in the first person. In some curious way this gives it a faint but nevertheless pervasive aura of unctuousness, which it would otherwise not have, and which the author almost certainly did not intend. The only character who really comes alive, who is described in the round, is the young African servant, Tickie; he alone is a different person at the end of the story, but he, too, would be more convincing for a few defects, stealing his master's cigarettes for instance.

I have already noted Mr van der Post's great knowledge of every aspect of the African scene, and while his book contains many passages of great lyrical beauty some of his descriptions are, at any rate in my opinion, far too lavish. His prose needs deflating and keeping under control; also he makes too much use of simile. In *Flamingo Feather* he has magnified everything to a sort of Wagnerian scale; but instead of only one Fafner, here we find them crouching under every tree. It is as though an artist, in some wild frenzy, had determined to use up on one last picture every drop of paint in his tube-box.

I have been thus critical of this book because I am convinced that Mr van der Post is easily capable of better things. *Venture to the Interior*, which was published a few years ago and is a more or less straightforward narrative of travel, has none of the faults of *Flamingo Feather*; it succeeds because it is written with restraint, and the author avoids just those pitfalls which this time, as I see it,

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have brought about his undoing. I believe he is the one man who has the knowledge and the sympathy to make the problems of Africa intelligible to the outside world; that is his real vocation. I think he is a born writer, but I am sure that he should in future avoid the fictional form.

JOHN MORRIS

LIVING IN THE PRESENT by John Wain. (Secker & Warburg. 12s. 6d.)

THE PICNIC AT SAKKARA by P. H. Newby. (Jonathan Cape. 12s. 6d.)

ACADEMIC YEAR by D. J. Enright. (Secker & Warburg. 12s. 6d.)

Few first novels have been received so gratefully in recent years as John Wain's *Hurry on Down* and Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim*. They were generally taken to herald a new fashion in comic writing, a return to the masculine farcial tradition of Fielding rather than the feminine irony of Jane Austen; certain aspects of modern life, humdrum, rather seedy and seldom described in fiction, formed a background for humorous incidents depending for their effects more on slapstick than on sophistication. They reintroduced an element of intellectual horseplay, and a remark often heard about them was 'It made me laugh out loud'. For some time the terms 'picaresque' and 'red-brick University' cropped up in discussions of modern writing; the first could be applied to Mr Wain's method, the second to Mr Amis's setting. Somehow or other, and as it seems with little relevance to the subject matter of these novels, a brief squabble sprang up between the defenders of the provincial and the metropolitan attitudes to culture; the former was accused of being drab and aggressive, the latter of being cliquey, dated and pretentious. Certainly both Mr Wain and Mr Amis show a decided contempt for any form of pretentiousness, which has resulted in a particular type of hero, designed to be as unpretentious as possible. Mr Wain's second novel, *Living in the Present*, reads as much like a sequel to *Lucky Jim* as to *Hurry on Down*; as it echoes different features found in both the earlier books, it helps to clarify the comic formula behind them all, and justifies a premature assumption that they may be considered as a group.

A young man, reluctantly connected with the teaching profession, clumsy, decent, hard-up and embarrassed by an unrewarding love affair, sees himself as surrounded by hostile and repellent figures. The comedy consists of his hysterical, but private abuse of these figures, and the ridiculous situations he creates for himself while trying to outwit them. Eventually, and as it appears miraculously, he wins a

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desirable girl and the villains are either discomfited or turn out to be not so villainous after all. A main source of amusement is the contrast between the hero's wild inner aggressiveness and his ineffectual behaviour. He is likely, at one point in the book, to drink too much out of nervousness and to behave stupidly as a result. A scene in *Living in the Present* when the hero starts to lie over the telephone, and is driven to extravagant lengths which deceive nobody, has an almost exact counterpart in *Lucky Jim*, and there are many other parallel situations. Mr Wain's Edgar, however, is a yet more virulent hater than Mr Amis's Jim; and while this form of defensive hate, stemming from a rueful consciousness of failure, can be very funny to read about, it can also, when carried to obsessive lengths, be as silly and embarrassing as it would be if encountered in life. The objects of Edgar's hate are awful but (as he himself realizes in time) comparatively harmless; accumulated abuse of people only dimly realized by the reader eventually palls.

It seems to me (though this may be because I read him second) that Mr Wain's technique is less assured than Mr Amis's; as a comedian, Jim's timing was better, but Edgar resembles the clown who falls on his face just once too often. Also, Mr Wain does not quite bring off the happy ending, which is welcome but unconvincing and slightly sentimental. But then, so perhaps was the ending to *Lucky Jim* . . . no doubt distinction between the books is arbitrary, a matter of personal preference. As is the case with many second novels, *Living in the Present* defines the limitations of talents that appeared stimulating and fresh in its predecessor; but it contains many extremely funny scenes, as well as another full-length portrait of the contemporary hero with a heart of gold and a chip on his shoulder, whose career is a picaresque journey from one *faux pas* to another.

All of P. H. Newby's novels have been distinguished by a quality that can be vaguely defined as taste, but his latest has a good deal more; his gifts, always apparent, have suddenly been placed in correct proportion to each other, and the result is an individual success. *The Picnic at Sakkara* is richly funny, although it may not make one laugh out loud. The author has performed a minor miracle of subtlety, balancing humour and pathos, fantasy and accurate observation so deftly that it is impossible to spot the places where these elements merge. The setting is Egypt in the days of King Farouk, and the two principal characters are Edgar Perry, a middle-aged and somewhat ineffectual English lecturer at Cairo University, and one of his pupils, Muawiya Khaslat, who forms an embarrassing and unpredictable affection for him. The story is consistently light in tone

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and contains many delicately comic incidents; but the relationship between Edgar and Muawiya, which in spite of ridiculous misunderstandings and mutual irritation expresses a real and touching desire to communicate, is handled with such justice that it adds depth to the comedy. It is impossible not to compare their abortive friendship with that of Fielding and Aziz in *A Passage to India*, and Mr Newby stands up to the comparison. His novel is an excellent example of an elegant and worldly comedy that is far from superficial and never sentimental, as comedies in their serious moments so easily may be.

D. J. Enright's *Academic Year* suffers unfairly from being considered near *The Picnic at Sakkara*, because it is remarkably similar but not so good; also a light comedy with serious undertones, it is set in Alexandria and the principal characters are English lecturers at the University there. Bacon, Packet and Brett have the same problems, the same sort of misadventures as Edgar Perry, and much the same point is made by the book as a whole. Mr Enright is a less experienced novelist than Mr Newby, and while his book contains some amusing episodes and much clever observation, it never really gets going as a novel. It is possible to stop reading it at the end of any chapter; the compulsion to continue is mysteriously lacking, and yet, far from being boring, it is positively enjoyable. Mr Wain bullies one into finishing his book, indignantly bustling one forward; Mr Newby calmly hypnotizes one into complete acceptance of his world; but Mr Enright politely ignores his readers altogether—one can take his story or leave it alone. The compulsion to finish a novel is an unknown factor that can be produced by worthless books, but no author can afford to leave it out of his calculations.

FRANCIS WYNDHAM

EXPERIENCES AND PLACES by Clifford Dymont. (*Dent. 6s.*)

RIDING LIGHTS by Norman MacCaig. (*Hogarth Press. 7s. 6d.*)

THE NIGHTFISHING by W. S. Graham. (*Faber. 10s. 6d.*)

To blame poetry for its lack of sincerity is not, of course, to question the personal sincerity of the poet, but to remark how he has fudged the gap between the heights he has aimed for and the stature of his talent. These three poets were born between 1911 and 1917 and have therefore lost the youthful ignorance of self that is the only excuse for pretentiousness. Measured against the yardstick of sincerity, Mr Dymont comes off best. His intellectual power is not outstanding: when he composes a poem demanding ideas, as in his two poems about Quarter Sessions, the ideas called forth lack real interest. His

wit and satire have a similar deficiency ('Charlotte Street pubs where the poets drink their food'). The verse in this volume, however, suffers little from these shortcomings. The experiences it records—nostalgia for youth and the country, snapshots of foreign parts—enable him to display without strain his talent for neat expression and his painstaking poetic eye. In one or two of them a deeper experience has been matched with a greater precision of image, a more complex expression. Such poems are 'The Carpenter', 'The King of the Wood', and, most notably, 'Writing is Not Writing'. But the whole book, for all its occasional nature, its rather sparse material, shows a most careful craftsmanship: that, and its plain, sensible diction, mark it as an important one, if not always for Mr Dyment's public, certainly for his own development in his crucial middle years.

It is an indication of the unusual interest of Mr MacCaig's book that the kind of trope which is almost the peak of *Experiences and Places* often represents for him only a foothold on the poem's ascent. 'Straws like tame lightnings lie about the grass'; 'The river plunged into its ravine/Like coins into a stocking'; and:

'A dragon-fly of mica whirs
Off and up; then makes a thin
Tottering grass its anchor post,
Changed to a small blue zeppelin.'

This quality of observation is very like Andrew Young's and, indeed, Mr MacCaig occasionally writes a whole poem to the older poet's sharp formula, and successfully, too. But more frequently the conceit is merely incidental to a larger purpose, and in fact many of the more ambitious poems are extended conceits of considerable complexity. The validity of metaphysical verse such as this depends on how far the poet can convince the reader that his elaborations correspond to a state of affairs in reality and a real emotion in himself. By this test a fair number of Mr MacCaig's poems fail to justify themselves. It is true that poems must tool themselves up to manufacture the article they propose to produce, but in Mr MacCaig's case one is not sure that the article exists independently of the machinery. In other words, he makes not always a point but a pseudo-point, which cannot stand up to examination. A simple instance is a four stanza poem about a farm: the first two stanzas are observation; in the third the poet says he is lying in the grass, not thinking, 'afraid of where a thought might take me': the last stanza is:

'Self under self, a pile of selves I stand
Threaded on time, and with metaphysic hand
Lift the farm like a lid and see
Farm within farm, and in the centre, me.'

Here that the point is pseudo scarcely matters—the tone is light, the poem subsists on the clever aperçus of its remaining stanzas. But other poems—‘By Comparison’, for example, and ‘Hidden Law’—are killed by the failure of the pay-off lines to illuminate, or by the bewildering elaboration of the machinery. Elaboration: one is not convinced that Mr MacCaig’s failure to communicate more simply is not the poet’s failure to see his argument more clearly.

I have dwelt on the faults of *Riding Lights* because it can resist criticism, because it reveals Mr MacCaig as a poet who has already written some perfect poems (‘Climbing Suilven’, ‘Swimming Lizard’, ‘Harpsichord Playing Bach’, for instance), provided memorable bits in many more, and seems stuck in neither his Youngish nor Donnesque manner but capable of development in several ways—towards, say, the greater realism hinted at here in the poems with a specific background of Edinburgh. His intellectual approach is prompted by a true and subtle interest in nature, time, and personality, and can never harden into a trick while it remains invigorated by an observation working at the pressure of much of this volume.

Mr Graham’s work comes from what is still our best publishing house for poetry, and is highly valued by a number of critics. Certainly, there is a striking image or two in the present collection: a herring boat coming into harbour ‘a sailing pillar of gulls’; the Clyde seen from the moors ‘sleeved in its firth’. And portions of the long title poem consist of good descriptions of the sea and sailing.

What the poems are in the end about is not always easy to say, because Mr Graham departs from the English language at the very moments when he should be imparting his meaning. The title poem is roughly about writing a poem about fishing at night, but the passages other than some describing physical action are tortuously solemn and loaded with a significance that seems rarely justified:

‘So I have been called by my name and
It was not sound. It is me named upon
The space which I continually move across
Bearing between my courage and my lack
The constant I bleed on.’

Such, and many similar lines, could be forgiven if they were merely the clotted occasions which come to every poet when he has not been able to find the proper equivalent for a complex or half-apprehended experience. But Mr Graham’s distortion and density appear at all moments. What can be the reason for these hideous and by no means untypical constructions: ‘Here, braced, announced on to the slow/Heaving seaboards, almost I am now too/Lulled.’ ‘The corks in a gentle wake,/Over curtains of water, tether us

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stopped, lapped/At far last still.' 'We look towards each other through' . . . ?

'Seven Letters', the second section of this volume, adds to dimness and execrable syntax the embarrassments of the poet's love-life. This intellectual's baby-talk is from 'Letter IV':

'My dear, all

You've had of me is always

Here. Lean here. Listen . . .

What a great way. So bright.

O the sea is meadowsweet . . . '

Letter V contains this kind of callow adolescent speech:

'You blush like new. You're shy

The same. What nets and beds

We've drifted on. It's tides

And tides ago. And here,

Here's where you wept the first

Time and me with only

A few words to my name.

Lie longing down, my dear

Again.'

My quotations will have shown something of Mr Graham's method of versification—the short or long line with a more or less arbitrary end. It could be plausibly argued that this is versification which denies the purpose and possibilities of metrical language, though Mr Graham does support it with internal (and occasionally external) rhyme and assonance. His device of repetition (which has been specifically singled out for praise) usually, I think, adds little but false portentousness:

'Let me be fond. Love,

Let me be fond awhile.'

The two ballads with which the book ends are written in more conventional style but without distinction. 'The Broad Close' contains a few ruderies and some Joycean puns. The eighteen stanzas of 'Baldy Bane' all end with the ill-chosen refrain 'Lie over to me from the wall or else/Get up and clean the grate'. But even these lighter poems propagate the importance of Mr Graham's personal life and talent for poetry.

Of course, all poetry must be about the poet's life and talent: unfortunately Mr Graham's talent fumbles and so to us his life is boring. In the sense in which I used the word at the outset *The Nightfishing* lacks sincerity, and poetry can have no more serious handicap.

ROY FULLER

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ENGLISH LITERATURE IN THE 16TH CENTURY by C. S. Lewis. (*Oxford University Press. 30s.*)

UTOPIA AND A DIALOGUE OF COMFORT by Thomas More. (*Dent. Everyman. 6s.*)

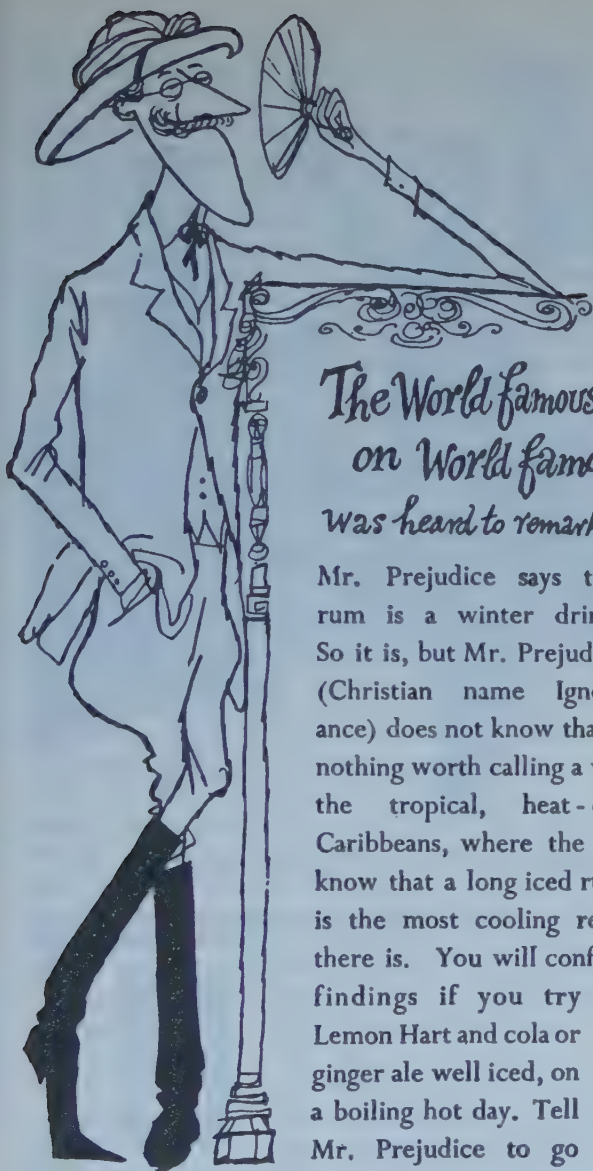
SIR PHILIP SIDNEY AND THE ENGLISH RENAISSANCE by John Buxton. (*Macmillan. 18s.*)

The massive enterprise of the Oxford History of English Literature must surely be one of the most difficult, as well as worth-while critical undertakings of our time. It is perhaps all the more difficult because such a work is certain of its place and public; it is bound to be read; it cannot, as the criticism of individual enterprise can, be overlooked or thrust aside. It would be very easy for a compilation of this kind to be essential to the student, the reference library, the schoolmaster, but uninteresting to the ordinary intelligent reader. It is all the more gratifying to find that Professor Lewis's new volume, which covers the most fruitful century in English literature, is not only so absorbing that there is not a single sag in it, but also exciting in its vigour, its freshness and the intensity of its penetration into the period with which it is concerned.

Professor Lewis, as poet, theologian and scholar, is particularly well chosen to deal with the writers of a time when poetry flowered like daffodils in April and when, as he asserts, the two principal pre-occupations of all public men were 'religion and government'. He sets his scene with precision in an admirable long Introduction which interprets for us 'The New Learning and the New Ignorance', and clears away some of the sentimental misconceptions which have accumulated about the name of Humanism. 'The more we look into the question, the harder we shall find it to believe that humanism had any power of encouraging, or any wish to encourage the literature that actually arose,' he writes, 'and it may be as well to confess immediately that I have no alternate explanation to offer. I do not claim to know why there were many men of genius at that time.'

He shows us in a study of the Scottish Literature at the close of the Middle Ages, how far behind, in spite of the legacy of Chaucer, England lagged at the beginning of her great century: how the sunrise of English literature was the sunset of a fine period in Scotland.

His division of English literature into 'Drab' and 'Golden' periods is sometimes a little difficult for the layman to grasp. We are told that we are not to take the words at their obvious meanings, and yet the associations of the words are so strong that they seem to affect even Professor Lewis himself; and although he explains that 'Drab' is not used in a derogatory, or 'Golden' in an eulogistic sense, it seems



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was heard to remark...*

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**LEMON
HART**

Ronald Searle

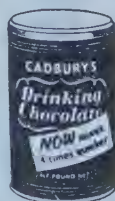
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now and then that he comes near to using them in this way, and we have to remind ourselves that 'Drab' represents the period of 'sober home-felt reality', of undecorated verse and prose, and 'Golden' 'poetry in its innocent—as the theologian would say "once-born"—condition!' It may be this slight difficulty about the terms that gives one an irrational shock at finding Wyatt among the 'Drab' poets.

Professor Lewis is not, however, too dogmatic or categorical in his divisions. His love for literature transcends all arbitrary distinctions. He sees the hidden vein of gold in poetry or prose wherever it may appear. In writing, for instance, of Thomas Edwards, whose work he dismisses as 'a bad imitation of Chapman at his worst', he quotes with delight the unexpectedly lovely couplet with which this otherwise inconsiderable poet lamented Philip Sidney's early death:

And thou, Arcadian knight, earthe's second Sunne
Reapt ere half ripe, finisht ere half begunne.

The chapter on Sidney and Spenser, earliest of the Golden poets, is probably the most satisfying in the book, and it is good to see justice done to the neglected *Arcadia*, which, in Professor Lewis's view 'is a kind of touchstone. What a man thinks of it, far more than what he thinks of Shakespeare, or Spenser or Donne, tests the depth of his sympathy with the 16th Century.' As Virginia Woolf wrote: 'In the *Arcadia*, as in some luminous globe, all the seeds of English fiction lie latent.'

Professor Lewis is hardly less interesting on sixteenth-century prose than on verse (except that, as Professor Garrod once said: 'After poetry, prose is so dull'). He is all the more effective because he takes sides, has lively likes and distastes, and is capable of a sudden homely, downright statement such as 'All good men love Margaret Roper...' or, of a certain kind of sixteenth-century humour, 'A steamy smell as of large dinners seems to pervade it all'. And again he will crystallize a phase of English literature in a single memorable comment as when he writes of the poets of the late years of the fifteenth century: 'This is the real midwinter of our poetry; all smudge, blur and scribble without a firm line or a clear colour anywhere.'

Professor Lewis's volume covers thoroughly every aspect of literature—poetry, prose, religious-controversy, translation. Only drama is omitted, because a separate volume of the Oxford History is to be devoted to it, so that Shakespeare appears purely as a poet, the prince of the Golden period, and Professor Lewis's short analysis of *The Phoenix and the Turtle* seems to penetrate to the heart not only of that wonderful poem but also of Shakespeare's whole

achievement: in it he maintains we have 'reached the garden of Adonis and seen where Imogens and Cordelias are made'.

In the end, it is the individual figures of 'the men of genius' who dominate the book, Thomas More, 'a humanist and a saintly man', but 'unmistakably rooted in a world of fat burgher laughter . . . a world not wanting in shrewdness, courage, honesty or kindness, but without fineness'; Philip Sidney, 'that rare thing, the aristocrat in whom the aristocratic ideal is really embodied'; Richard Hooker whose 'model of the universe' has 'unsurpassed grace and majesty'. These and other great men stand out in Professor Lewis's pages, giving to the book its vitality, its warmth and its flavour.

Writing of Thomas More, Professor Lewis remarks that his *Dialogue of Comfort Against Tribulation* 'is (or was) accessible in a cheap reprint'. It is pleasant to record that this deeply moving work — than which nothing could be more apt for our times — has just been reissued with *Utopia* in the new format of Everyman's Library. The Introduction by John Warrington is perhaps a little uninspired, but one can only agree with Professor Lewis that the book 'should be on everyone's shelves': 'the theme is almost the gravest that the human mind can entertain, but it must not be supposed that the book is a gloomy one . . . it overflows with kindness and humour and the beautiful self-mockery of old age'.

It would seem that as conflict produces great art, periods of acute controversy produce their saints. The England of 'the old profession' bred its Thomas More; the Reformed Religion and the new Elizabethan age had their Philip Sidney of whom Professor Lewis writes, 'even at this distance, Sidney is dazzling'. His importance as a poet, a prose writer and as the first English literary critic of real stature was only equalled by his pre-eminence as a patron of letters. It is from this angle that Mr John Buxton approaches him, in his civilized and gracefully written study, and he places him in relief against the whole Renaissance background. He has fresh, detailed information about Sidney's education and about the parts played not only by Sidney himself and his brilliant sister Mary, the Countess of Pembroke and 'most dear lady' of the *Arcadia*, but also by their family and descendants, in fostering the arts and especially the art of writing. He makes it clear that it was not merely their money (Philip Sidney was never a rich man) but their sympathetic understanding that made them the natural discoverers, friends and protectors of genius, and that it was the measure of their perceptions that among those who turned to them, or to their children, for assistance were Spenser, Ben Jonson and Shakespeare.

One may, perhaps, demur a little at Mr Buxton's preference for

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the Wallace biography of Sidney, useful as it is, rather than the excellent, recently revised study by Miss Mona Wilson; and not all the portraits which illustrate his book are happily chosen, though the engraving of The Countess of Pembroke from Livio Alessandri's translation of the *Arcadia* is irresistibly charming. These, however, are minor cavillings at a work which is lucid, well-balanced and dignified, as befits its subject, and presents Sidney with, in the words of Demetrios Capetanakis, 'his deep concern for life, which he desired as full, pure and noble as possible'.

BARBARA COOPER

Notes About Our Authors

THOM GUNN is 24, and came down from Cambridge two years ago. Some of his poems were broadcast in *New Soundings* on the BBC Third Programme and a first collection, *Fighting Terms*, was published by The Fantasy Press last year. He now holds a Stanford Creative Writing Fellowship in the USA.

JOHN PETER, a South African by birth, is now living in Canada, where he is Associate Professor of English in the University of Manitoba. He has contributed studies of T. S. Eliot to *Essays in Criticism*.

GWYN WILLIAMS was head of the English faculty of the University of Alexandria during the war. He contributed translations from the Welsh and original articles to *Personal Landscape*, *Wales* and other publications. A volume of his lyrics from the Welsh was brought out by *Poetry (London)* and his *Introductions to Welsh Poetry* was published in 1953.

STEPHEN GARDINER is a young architect living in Chelsea. He has contributed poems and drawings to various periodicals. A drawing of the Albert Bridge by him appeared in *The London Magazine*, Volume 1, No 9.

JOHN MORRIS was educated privately and at King's College, Cambridge. He has travelled over the greater part of the world, and was a member of the 1922, 1924 and 1936 Mount Everest Expeditions. For some years before the last war, he was Professor of English Literature at Tokyo. He has written several semi-autobiographical travel books, including *Traveller from Tokyo*. He is now the Controller of the BBC Third Programme.